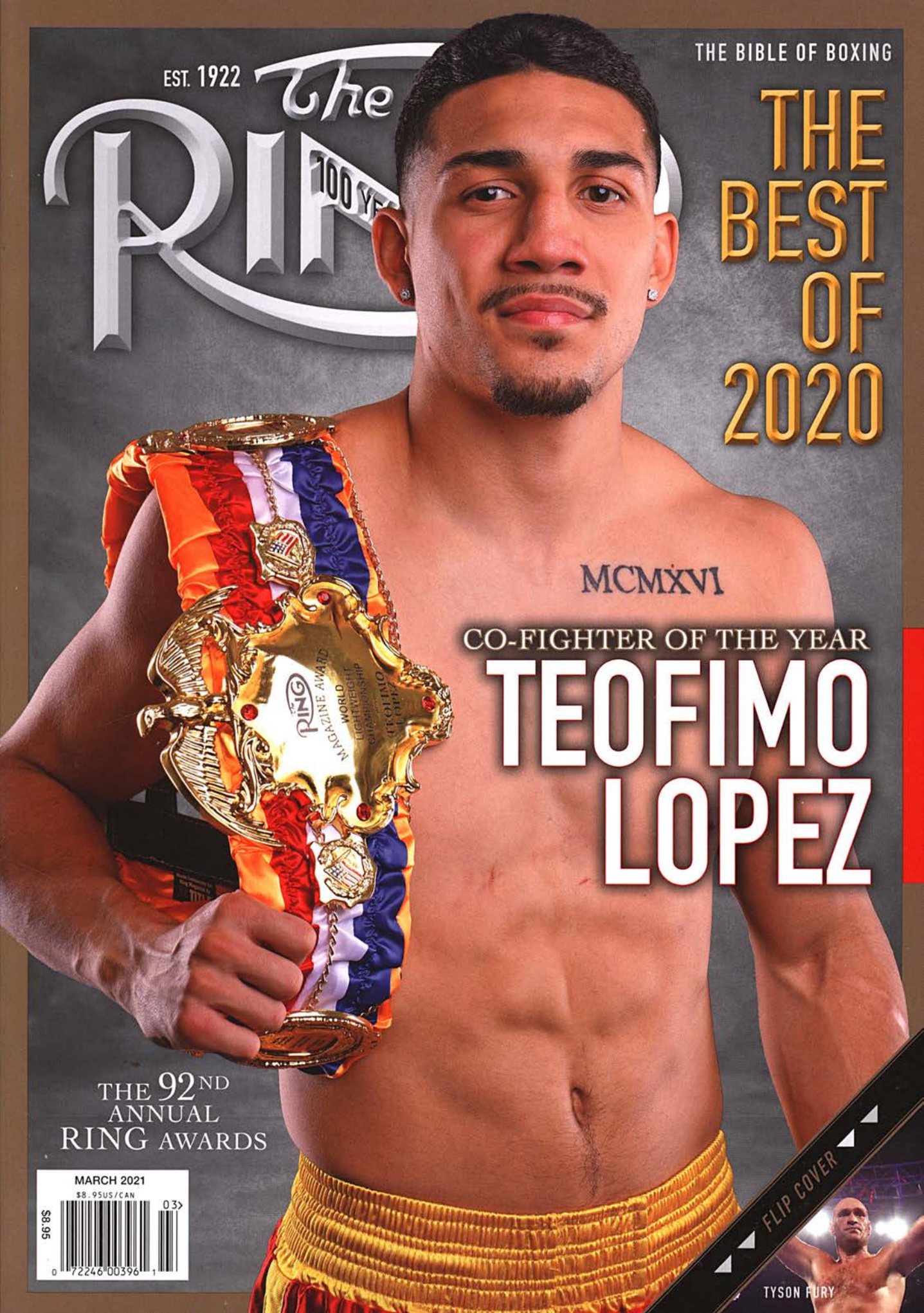
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Turn the magazine over for The Ring's feature on Tyson Fury. See all the 2020 award winners at ringtv.com

COVER PHOTO BY MATTHEW HEASLEY

OPENING SHOT

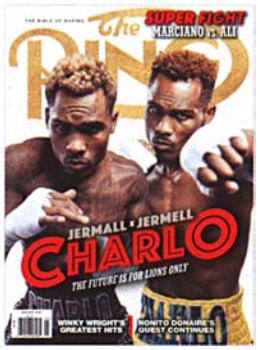
A crowd of 16,102 fans were allowed to watch home favorite Errol Spence Jr.'s triumphant return to the ring against Danny Garcia at the 80,000-capacity AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

AT&T STADIUM

RONALD MARTINEZ

STOP THE CHARLO BASHING

While it was good to see the Charlo twins on the cover of The Ring (January 2021), the treatment they received in this latest book of "The Bible" left a sour taste in my mouth. Thomas Hauser's piece took pains to denigrate both their marketability and – still worse – the quality of the opposition they have faced. At the time of the fight, Jermell was the Ring champion at 154 [editor's note: Charlo picked up the vacant Ring belt by knocking out Jeison Rosario but didn't go into the fight wearing it], having beaten everyone he faced in that well-stocked division. In his one "loss," he outlanded the winner (Tony Thompson) by a large margin. Jermall was undefeated and the 160-pound WBC champion, and he defeated Sergiy Derevyanchenko far more decisively than either Danny Jacobs or Gennadiy Golovkin. In other words, by questioning their opposition, Hauser disrespected The Ring's ratings, not to mention the two fighters.



I know little about the business side of their careers. But I'm grateful that they have fought so often on TV. As a fan, it has been a pleasure to follow their development from its outset to now, Hauser notwithstanding.

Bernard Freydberg
Gulfport, Fla.

MR. HAUSER'S RESPONSE: First, Jermell Charlo beat Tony Harrison, not Tony Thompson. Second, I think the Charlos are good fighters. They'd be competitive against anyone from 154 to 168 pounds. But neither one has fought – let alone, beaten – an elite fighter in his prime. Let's see Jermell vs. Errol Spence at 154 or Jermall vs. Canelo or Danny Jacobs at a 166-pound catchweight. Then we'll have a better handle on how good they are. As for their marketability, the low number of pay-per-view buys for their doubleheader speaks for itself.

MOLONEY WAS ROBBED

The decision in the Andrew Moloney-Joshua Franco fight that Franco's cut was caused by a head clash made no sense.

1. It would take a significant head clash or a punch to cause Franco's eye injury.
2. On such a clash, a ref would stop the fight to examine the boxers. This did not happen.
3. I never saw the boxers react as if there had been a head clash.
4. Referee Russell Mora seemed anxious not to let the bout go four rounds.
5. Moloney was giving Franco a beating with his fists.

There are too many robberies in boxing.

Joe B. Gambill
Dallas, Texas

Once, the Nevada State Athletic Commission was the shining beacon of knowledge, fairness, hope and justice. Once, it was looked upon as the best of the best. That illusion exists no more. After the horrendous decision to deny Andrew Moloney the WBA junior bantamweight "regular" title in his fight against Joshua Franco, the whole boxing world is aghast. It is this observer's belief that the commission was protecting the referee, Russell Mora. Why? He simply made a mistake. Any of us could have made the same mistake. There is no shame in that happening. What is scandalous is perpetuating discrimination against a foreign fighter unjustly. My conclusion: It was a hometown decision in favor of the referee. Andrew Moloney is the uncrowned WBA "regular" junior bantamweight champion of the world.

Oliver Tuthill
Portland, Ore.

DUCKING THE RULES

Tom Gray's article in the January 2021 issue on Jimmy Young vs. Muhammad Ali in 1976 showing the punch stats that favored Young does not tell the story. I saw that fight on live TV back then, and Young would throw a volley of punches at Ali, then duck his head under the top ropes, and Ali had to wait for Young to get back in the ring. I can't remember the referee, but the referee warned Young many times to not slip under the ropes. The referee did not penalize Young, so the judges gave their decision to Ali. If that fight was in England or elsewhere in Europe, they would have disqualified Young for ducking under the ropes, as over there they enforce the rules. Young was a good fighter. I watched Young on TV vs. Kenny Norton when Young lost a decision to Norton. I thought Young won that fight.

Richard Prince
Gorham, N.H.

EXHIBITIONISM

I feel that the upcoming Mayweather vs. Logan Paul exhibition is making a mockery out of boxing. For one, it gives the impression to a new generation of fans that just anyone can be competitive in the ring with an established and experienced champion. As an avid fan since the mid to late '70s, I have been able to witness many great champions perform in many high-profile bouts during some truly special eras – Ali, Holmes, Arguello, Pryor, Chavez, a young Tyson, Holyfield, the Fab 4, etc. These were fighters that in most cases toiled for years before earning a significant income while learning their craft. Although we live in an instant-gratification society, I am insulted as a knowledgeable fan that such rubbish is being distributed to the public. Mayweather has been handpicking opponents for years, despite the welterweight division being consistently loaded with outstanding talent. However, I didn't think he'd stoop this low in facing Paul, who has no real boxing experience. What this event comes down to is a disgraceful money-grab in which both participants should be ashamed of themselves. Does Floyd really need money so bad that he's willing to tarnish his reputation by performing against a YouTuber? Also, shame on the state athletic commission for sanctioning this crap as well as the promoter. I am genuinely concerned that pointless events such as this are going to become a normal trend and tarnish boxing even further at a time when it needs it the least.

Daniel McKrell
Parma, Ohio

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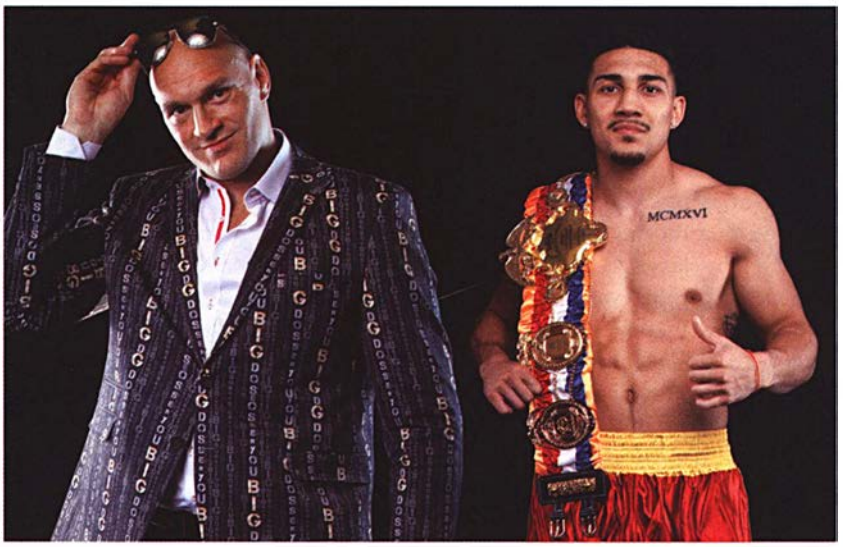
RINGSIDE BY DOUG FISCHER

SOMETIMES IT TAKES TWO



With both style and substance, our co-Fighters of the Year made two equally huge statements in 2020.

I won't be shocked if we get some grief from boxing purists for sharing the Fighter of the Year award between Teofimo Lopez and Tyson Fury. Sports fans always prefer a clear winner over a draw verdict even if the contest was a legitimate dead heat.

However, even boxing's hardcore followers, who often love to complain, may concede that 2020 has been the most uncommon year in recent memory and give us a break on naming co-Fighters of the Year, which is rare but not unprecedented (as you'll learn when you read Don Stradley's article on the flipside page 6 of this magazine).

Diehard fans understand that most of the sport's elite fighters – which include Canelo Alvarez, Anthony Joshua, Gennadiy Golovkin, Naoya Inoue, Terence Crawford, Aleksandr Usyk, Errol Spence, Juan Francisco Estrada, Josh Taylor, Jose Ramirez, Gervonta Davis, Jermell and Jermall Charlo – only fought once in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of the boxers mentioned were decided (sometimes overwhelming) odds favorites in their lone matchups of 2020.

Lopez and Fury were up against perceived threats. Lopez was a 3-to-1 underdog against Vasiliy Lomachenko, the pound-for-pound-rated three-division titleholder. The odds were more even with Fury's challenge to Deontay Wilder, but the unbeaten WBC heavyweight titleholder carried the mystique of boxing's hardest puncher into their anticipated rematch and was the favorite among media and boxing insiders.

Their clear victories over respected opposition stood out the most in a truncated year, but deciding which one was truly "better" or more significant for the sport was nigh impossible.

Both victories crowned new Ring Magazine champions. Fury's TKO win was more dominant, but Lopez outpointed a master boxer and defending unified lightweight champ. Fury-Wilder II was the biggest boxing event of the year, garnering 800,000 pay-per-view buys and generating a near-$17 million gate, but Lopez-Lomachenko aired live on ESPN, peaking with an audience of 2.9 million, according to Nielsen Ratings (along with 1.5 million views via the ESPN+ app), and resulting in a pound-for-pound changing of the guard.

Bottom line: Fury and Lopez beat

Wilder and Lomachenko at their own game and created a buzz that reverberated outside of the boxing world.

The way I see it, both are equally deserving of the Fighter of the Year honor. The sport is lucky to have two elite-level boxers with dynamic personalities and a deep-seated need to prove that they're the best of their weight classes.

It sucks that they were only able to fight once in 2020, but their big victories will likely lead to bigger, more significant fights in 2021 and 2022.

Fury's headed toward the grandest event in boxing (maybe all sport) with the Joshua showdown. Lopez is in position to spearhead high-profile round robins at lightweight (vs. Davis, Devin Haney and Ryan Garcia) and junior welterweight (vs. Taylor, Ramirez, Regis Prograis and Jose Zepeda).

In a year of frustration and anguish, fans needed something to celebrate and something to be hopeful about in the near future. Lopez and Fury delivered that in 2020.

★ ★ ★ ★

You may notice that this year-end awards issue is missing a selection for Upset of the Year and Round of the Year. We haven't gotten rid of those awards. (In fact, we've added a new one – Performance of the Year – to the lineup.)

Those honors were announced on RingTV.com before the close of 2020. We had solid selections for all three, but because the pandemic pushed so many significant fights past our original editorial deadline for this issue (which was prior to the December 12 Joshua-Pulev fight before we extended it to the next weekend, which featured Golovkin vs. Kamil Szeremeta and Canelo vs. Callum Smith) we decided to keep those three awards open.

Joshua, Golovkin and Alvarez were all solid favorites, but anything can happen in boxing.

By the way, if you're upset that we announced these awards on our website before the 115-pound showdown between WBO beltholder Kazuto Ioka and Kosei Tanaka on New Year's Eve in Tokyo, give yourself 25 "Boxing Hipster" credits (redeemable for 100 hardcore fan likes on Twitter or instant Contender status in the BoxingScene.com Forum). If you're mad that we didn't name the Ioka-Tanaka winner the 2020 Fighter of the Year, give yourself 100 credits.

RUNNERS-UP

All of the selections for the 2020 year-end awards were deserving of the honor, but I thought there were some worthy runners-up that merited mention.

Fighter of the Year – Roman Gonzalez. See my Comeback of the Year article on Chocolatito for details. The winner of his anticipated rematch with Juan Francisco Estrada (scheduled for March 13 as we went to press) will be an early 2021 candidate for this award.

Fight of the Year – Estrada-Carlos Cuadras II. One more rematch down, one to go. Can "El Gallo," who also won his rematch with Srisaket Sor Rungvisai, go 3-0 in return bouts vs. his 115-pound rivals?

KO of the Year – Alexander Povetkin TKO 5 Dillian Whyte. I won't say Povetkin's stoppage was a better knockout than Davis' icy one-hitter-quitter against Leo Santa Cruz, because it wasn't, but the Russian veteran (almost 41) getting up from two knockdowns to land the game-changer added significance to this one.

Event of the Year – Wilder-Fury II. Kudos to Top Rank, Queensberry Promotions, Premier Boxing Champions, ESPN, FOX and, of course, the two fighters for creating a legitimate superfight atmosphere in Las Vegas that was worthy of the heavyweight championship.

Trainer of the Year – Robert Garcia. The mighty RGBA (Robert Garcia Boxing Academy) continues to roll on. Mikey Garcia, Jose Ramirez, Joshua Franco, Vergil Ortiz Jr., Josesito Lopez and Jesse Rodriguez all won big in 2020 (and those who lost – Jackson Marinez and Luis Coria – still kicked ass).

Upset of the Year – Carlos Gongora KO 12 Ali Akhmedov. Maybe it's because this upset happened just as we went to press, so it's fresh on my mind, but I thought the unknown Ecuadorian was valiant in weathering Akhmedov's early-rounds storm and brilliant in breaking down the brute-strong GGG understudy over the second half of their super middleweight barnburner.

Performance of the Year – Canelo Alvarez UD 12 Callum Smith. Let's start calling Alvarez the Giant Killer, because the bigger his opponents are, the more he bosses them around in the ring. Alvarez joined an elite group of three-division Ring champions with the one-sided victory.

Prospect of the Year – Take your pick: Jesse Rodriguez. Edgar Berlanga. Elvis Rodriguez. You can't go wrong. The future looks bright.

CANELO: MICHELLE FARSI/MATCHROOM

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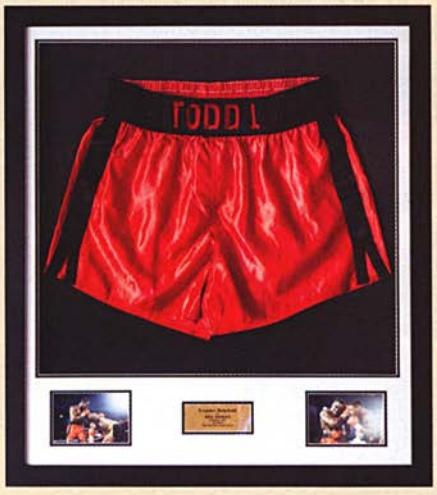

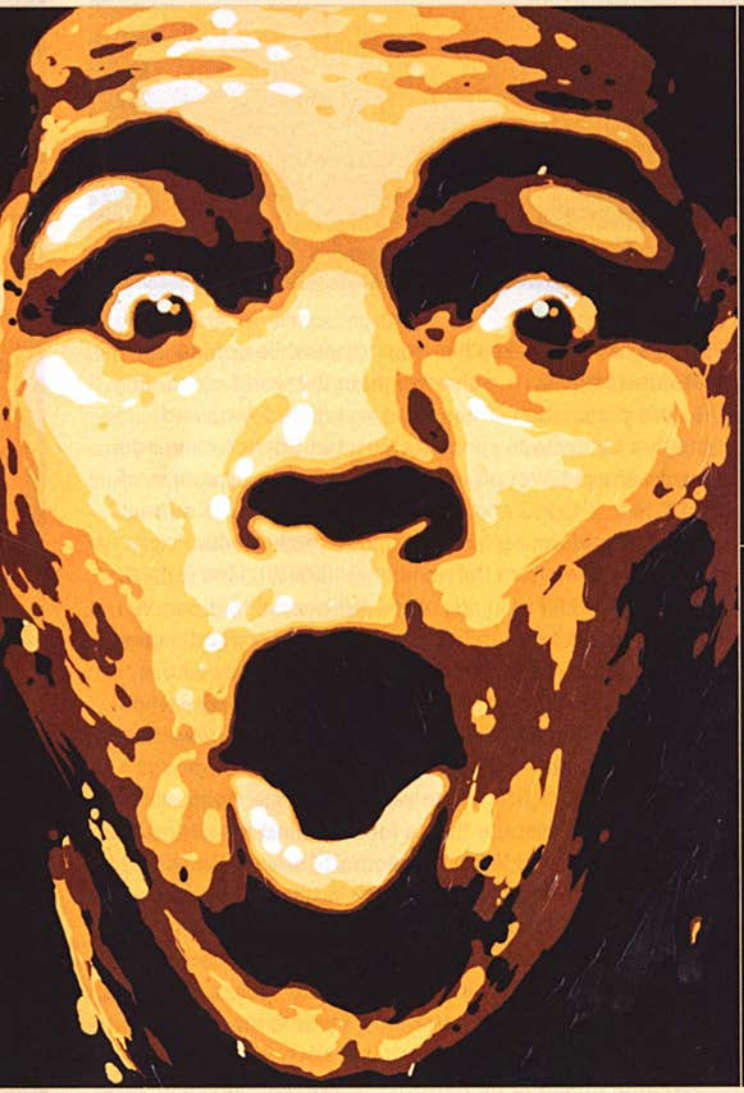

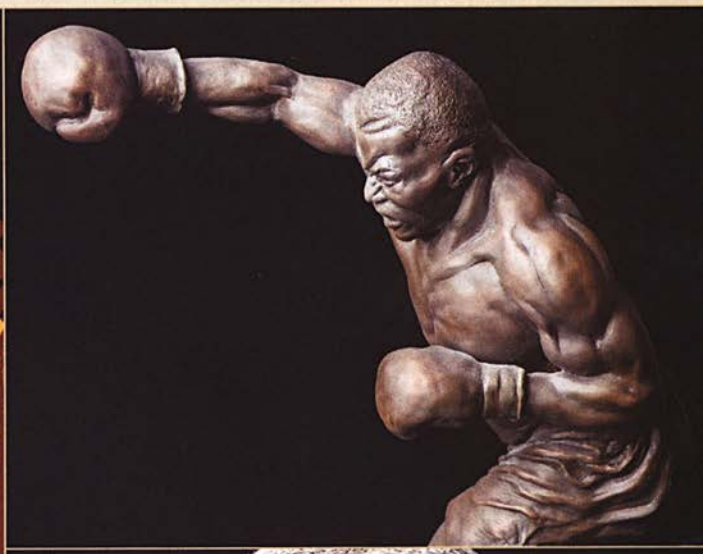

ROUND 1

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH ★ NEW FACES +

FIGHTER OF THE MONTH

ERROL SPENCE JR.

We knew that Errol Spence Jr. had been lucky to escape with his life following a high-speed crash in his Ferrari last October. It turns out that he was even luckier than we thought. After 14 months out of the ring, Spence returned to action against former two-division titleholder Danny Garcia on December 5 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, and if the physical ordeal that the lefty endured had affected his fighting skills, then the naked eye couldn't detect it. The 30-year-old IBF and WBC welterweight titleholder was sharp from the opening bell, controlling distance and dominating the action behind a speedy and educated right jab. When Garcia did let his hands go, the home fighter answered in kind and doubled the dosage. It was this very approach that saw Spence defeat Kell Brook for his first world title in May 2017 and unify against Shawn Porter just days prior to his horrifying accident. Against Garcia, he reminded fans and critics of what makes him so special while confirming his status as the No. 1 welterweight in the world, according to this publication. There were no knockdowns and neither fighter was seriously hurt, but Spence claimed a well-earned 12-round unanimous decision by scores of 117-111, 116-112 and 116-112. "The moment is surreal," Spence said during his post-fight interview with Fox. "Coming back from the accident, I feel like I looked pretty good. All training camp I felt good. I told people I didn't want a tune-up fight, that I wanted to fight a great champion like Danny Garcia, somebody whose name is known, somebody who will give me a fight. He gave me a fight, and I proved to everyone that I'm the best 147-pound fighter in the world." One man who would dispute that is fellow pound-for-pound star and WBO counterpart Terence Crawford, who stopped Brook in four rounds three weeks earlier. It was a touch disconcerting that neither Spence nor Crawford called each other out following their respective wins, but that's simply down to the fact that they're no longer willing to state the obvious. The politics that have blocked this superfight need to be removed. Then, and only then, will we find out "The Truth." RING

RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES

NEW FACES

VIC PASILLAS

By **Anson Wainwright**

Age: 28
Hometown: East Los Angeles, California
Weight class: junior featherweight
Height/Reach: 5-foot-5 (165 cm)/65 in (165 cm)
Amateur record: 272-6
Turned pro: 2011
Pro record: 16-0 (9 knockouts)
Trainer: Brian Schwartz
Manager: Greg Hannley/Prince Ranch Boxing
Promoter: No promoter
Instagram: @viciousvicpasillas

BEST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: Pasillas had a career-best performance in his most recent outing, a sixth-round stoppage of the previously unbeaten Ranfis Encarnacion in September.

"I've had a lot of great showouts, a lot of cool knockouts," Pasillas told The Ring. "But as far as showcasing my talent and adjusting, using my speed, I feel [Encarnacion] was my best performance. I was able to display everything me and my coach practiced back home for the first time in my whole professional career."

WORST NIGHT OF PRO CAREER AND WHY: Pasillas recalls two fights early in his pro career when his performance was influenced by conditions that were not ideal.

"One of my worst performances was my third fight, against Jazzma Hogue," he said. "I was the swing bout at 11:30 at night. I fought after Brandon Rios and Mike Alvarado. It was miserable.

"My fifth fight (vs. Jesus Lule) was at almost midnight; I fought after the main event (Jessie Vargas vs. Ray Narh). It was so cold at the Thomas & Mack. I felt every time I hit the guy, my hand was going to break. I didn't really like the performance."

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: Pasillas was an amateur standout from the age of 10 until he was 18, ranked joint-No. 1 in the country at 123 pounds alongside future WBO 122-pound titleholder Jessie Magdaleno, before turning professional in 2011. He believed it was the smarter move, rather than wait with no guarantee of qualification for the 2012 London Olympics.

"I found out that my now-wife was pregnant with my son," he said. "At that moment, I just needed money to look after my family. I got offers to turn professional and I looked at it like we can struggle for a year-and-a-half or I can turn pro now, and my first fight can be on the Manny Pacquiao-Juan Manuel Marquez III card."

During his amateur career, he beat current WBC/WBO junior welterweight titleholder Jose Ramirez several times and also owns a win over IBF 130-pound beltholder Joseph Diaz Jr. He has sparred with the stars, including Nonito Donaire and Vasiliy Lomachenko, and was a regular at Freddie Roach's gym in Hollywood.

"I grew up sparring in the Wild Card; I sparred a lot of people," said Pasillas. "I feel like I'm a well-rounded fighter. I can punch with both hands. My technique, if I don't want to get hit, I don't get hit. My footwork and speed are very good. My biggest thing is how I can make everything work together."

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: Pasillas is a skilled southpaw with no obvious weaknesses. However, he turns 29 in February and needs to make his move. Pasillas has fought just 16 times in a nine-year career, a fact that weighs on him.

"I feel inactivity is what kills me," he said. "Inactivity is the only thing holding me back right now."

STORYLINES: Pasillas was born and raised on the notoriously tough streets of East Los Angeles, without a positive influence from his parents.

"I had limited options, and boxing was my thing," he said. "My father got murdered when I was a [baby] – I never got to meet him – and my mother went to jail [a few years later]."

He lived out of a car with his mother until he was 3½ and went to live with his grandmother. He was later adopted by his uncle, who was able to help stabilize the youngster's life.

"We had to break the trend in our family," said Pasillas. "Everyone going to jail, drug abuse, getting killed or doing bad things."

You couldn't blame Pasillas if he'd disowned his mother, but he and his brother have helped to support her since she was deported to Mexico.

"She never raised me, but you only get one mother," he said. "Once I become world champion, hopefully I can bring her back."

Between 2015-2018, Pasillas stepped away from boxing for nearly two-and-a-half-years after he was released by Top Rank, which had signed him in 2011.

"I was really broke, two kids, a wife, and my wife got a job at Ross, working 40 hours a week. My coach created a gym for me. I was parking cars at our old gym. I was making about $100 a day."

After a conversation with a gym mate, things quickly changed.

"I started being a boxing trainer for kids," he said. "That first year, I made about $175,000 training people."

But as often happens, he was drawn back in.

"I had an epiphany after one of the events," Pasillas explained. "One of my guys said, 'You don't seem happy.' I said, 'I really, really miss boxing.' Every time I would watch boxing on the TV, I'd be sitting there with tears in my eyes. I was so happy when my friends Joseph Diaz and Jose Ramirez won world titles.

"In October 2017, I got a message from my good buddy Greg Hannley – he's my manager now. He wrote me and asked how I was, and he brought me down to his house. He said, 'Let's get you three or four fights, get your confidence back and get your name back out there and then start looking for big fights. That's what we did."

Pasillas has won all five fights since then, inside the distance, and he expects to fight in early 2021.

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk and you can follow him on Twitter@AnsonWainwright.

SEAN MICHAEL HAM - TGB PROMOTIONS

BREAKING UP THE HEAVYWEIGHT DIVISION

JABS AND STRAIGHT WRITES

BY THOMAS HAUSER

There's a natural (and appropriate) inclination to roll one's eyes when a world sanctioning body proposes a new weight division. But the World Boxing Council's plan to add a weight class between cruiserweight and heavyweight merits a fair hearing.

The first cruiserweight champion was Marvin Camel, who won a March 31, 1980, decision over Mate Parlov to claim the WBC cruiserweight crown. At the time, the cruiserweight limit was 190 pounds. It was later raised to 200. The light heavyweight limit (the next division down) has remained steady at 175 pounds.

WBC president Mauricio Sulaiman believes that the size of modern heavyweights has rendered current weight classifications obsolete and that a 220-pound heavyweight can't compete on equal terms with today's giants. Thus, he has championed the creation of a new division that would run from 200 to 224 pounds.

One can take issue with Sulaiman's plan. As Emanuel Steward noted, "A good 210-pound puncher can knock anyone out."

Speed and quickness also have to be factored into the equation.

Mike Tyson weighed between 215 and 220 pounds when he was at his best. After seeing how Anthony Joshua fared against Andy Ruiz, most knowledgeable observers would pick Tyson in his prime over the much larger Joshua.

Evander Holyfield competed on even terms with larger men like Lennox Lewis and Riddick Bowe. Deontay Wilder weighed 212½ pounds when he fought to a draw against Tyson Fury and 214¾ and 219½ pounds when he twice whacked out Luis Ortiz.

Also, keep in mind that some fighters would dry out to make the 224-pound limit and come into the ring on fight night in the neighborhood of 240 pounds.

That said, today's athletes are bigger than their predecessors. Prior to the 1960s, not a single player in the National Football League weighed 300 pounds. Now there are college teams whose offensive and defensive lines average more than that. Jack Dempsey at his best weighed between 185 and 190 pounds. Rocky Marciano weighed 184 pounds when he knocked out Joe Louis and a half-pound more when he dethroned Jersey Joe Walcott.

Anyone who watched Aleksandr Usyk struggle against Derek Chisora late last year understands the issue.

So . . . How should boxing handle the situation?

I'll accept the need for an additional weight class at the high end of the spectrum. But 224 pounds is too high. Thus, I suggest the following: light heavyweight limit 175 pounds, cruiserweight limit 195 pounds, new division limit 215 pounds.

Also, at present, there are eight weight divisions between 105 and 130 pounds. That's too many. Once upon a time ("when boxing was boxing," as the saying goes), the sweet science had eight weight divisions total. Boxing would be well-served if today's bottom eight weight divisions were consolidated into six. But given the sanctioning bodies' lust for sanctioning fees, that won't happen.

Finally, for more than a century, there was something almost sacrosanct about the heavyweight championship of the world. Fights like the 1938 rematch between Joe Louis and Max Schmeling and the war of attrition between Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier in Manila took on an almost mythological quality.

In recent decades, multiple sanctioning organizations with multiple heavyweight "champions" have tarnished the heavyweight throne. But the heavyweights are still boxing's glamour division. As of this writing, Sulaiman says that the new weight class will be named the "bridgerweight" division to honor a 6-year-old boy named Bridger Walker who (we are told) saved his 4-year-old sister from a vicious dog. One might add that the new division will be a bridge between the cruiserweight and heavyweight divisions. Either way, it's an uninspiring name. But at least it doesn't divide the heavyweight division into "heavyweights" and "super heavyweights." The "heavyweight champion" should always be The Man.

★ ★ ★ ★

Sean Connery, who rose to international stardom as James Bond, died on October 31 at age 90.

Connery starred in myriad films and won an Academy Award for best supporting actor for his role in *The Untouchables*. At the end of his long and distinguished film career, he was honored with knighthood. But the enduring image of Connery is as Agent 007 ("Bond, James Bond"), who saved the world from villains like Auric Goldfinger and liked his martinis "shaken, not stirred."

Connery played Agent 007 in the first five Bond movies: *Dr. No* (1962), *From Russia with Love* (1963), *Goldfinger*

Evander Holyfield never had an issue with giving away weight to modern-day goliaths like Lennox Lewis.

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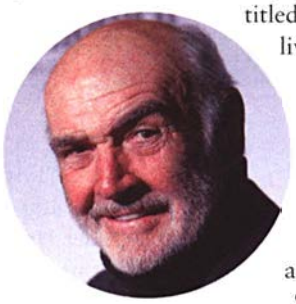
(1964), *Thunderball* (1965), and *You Only Live Twice* (1967). He left the franchise over a monetary dispute but returned later for two more Bond films – *Diamonds are Forever* (1971) and *Never Say Never Again* (1983).

The early James Bond films were innovative and cutting edge for their time, although they reflected an age in which it was acceptable to stereotype beautiful women as playthings. Connery was succeeded in the role by George Lazenby, Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton, Pierce Brosnan and Daniel Craig. David Niven also tried his hand in a more satirical interpretation of 007. But for millions of moviegoers, Connery will always be Bond. The others are imposters.



James Bond star Sean Connery had a link to the sweet science.

Agent 007 dominated Connery's public persona more than he would have liked. "There are a lot of things I did before Bond – like playing the classics on stage – that don't seem to get publicized," he said in a 1965 interview. "This Bond image is a problem in a way and a bit of a bore, but one has just got to live with it."

So what does this have to do with a boxing magazine?

Boxing was a foundation stone for Connery's success as an actor.

Requiem for a Heavyweight is justifiably celebrated as one of the greatest boxing movies of all time. The 1962 film starred Anthony Quinn as an over-the-hill fighter named Luis "Mountain" Rivera with a conniving manager (played by Jackie Gleason) and compliant trainer (Mickey Rooney). A young heavyweight prospect named Cassius Clay had a bit part in the film.

But before Requiem for a Heavyweight was a feature film, it was staged as a play on live television. Rod Serling wrote and produced it in 1956 for a popular American show called *Playhouse 90* with Jack Palance in the lead role (the fighter was then named Harlan "Mountain" McClintock). One year later, *Blood Money* (as the English production was titled) was televised by the BBC live in the United Kingdom.

Palance was slated for the lead role in the English production but pulled out at the last minute. Desperate for a replacement, the producers turned to an unknown actor named Sean Connery. After the show aired, a review in The Times (of London) praised Connery for his "shambling and inarticulate charm." Film offers for the young Scottish actor were soon pouring in.

★ ★ ★ ★

All fighters are nervous in the 24 hours leading up to a fight. And the condition often takes its greatest toll when a fighter is trying to sleep the night before the fight.

In 1996, Michael Grant, then a young heavyweight on the rise, asked Vernon Forrest, who was five years away from his career-defining victory over Shane Mosley, how he dealt with the problem.

"It's simple," Forrest responded. "I'm 18-0 with 15 knockouts. So if I'm lying in bed thinking about the other guy, I say to myself, 'Hey, he's lying in bed right now thinking about me. And I'm a lot happier right now than he is.'" RING

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In 2019, Hauser was selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

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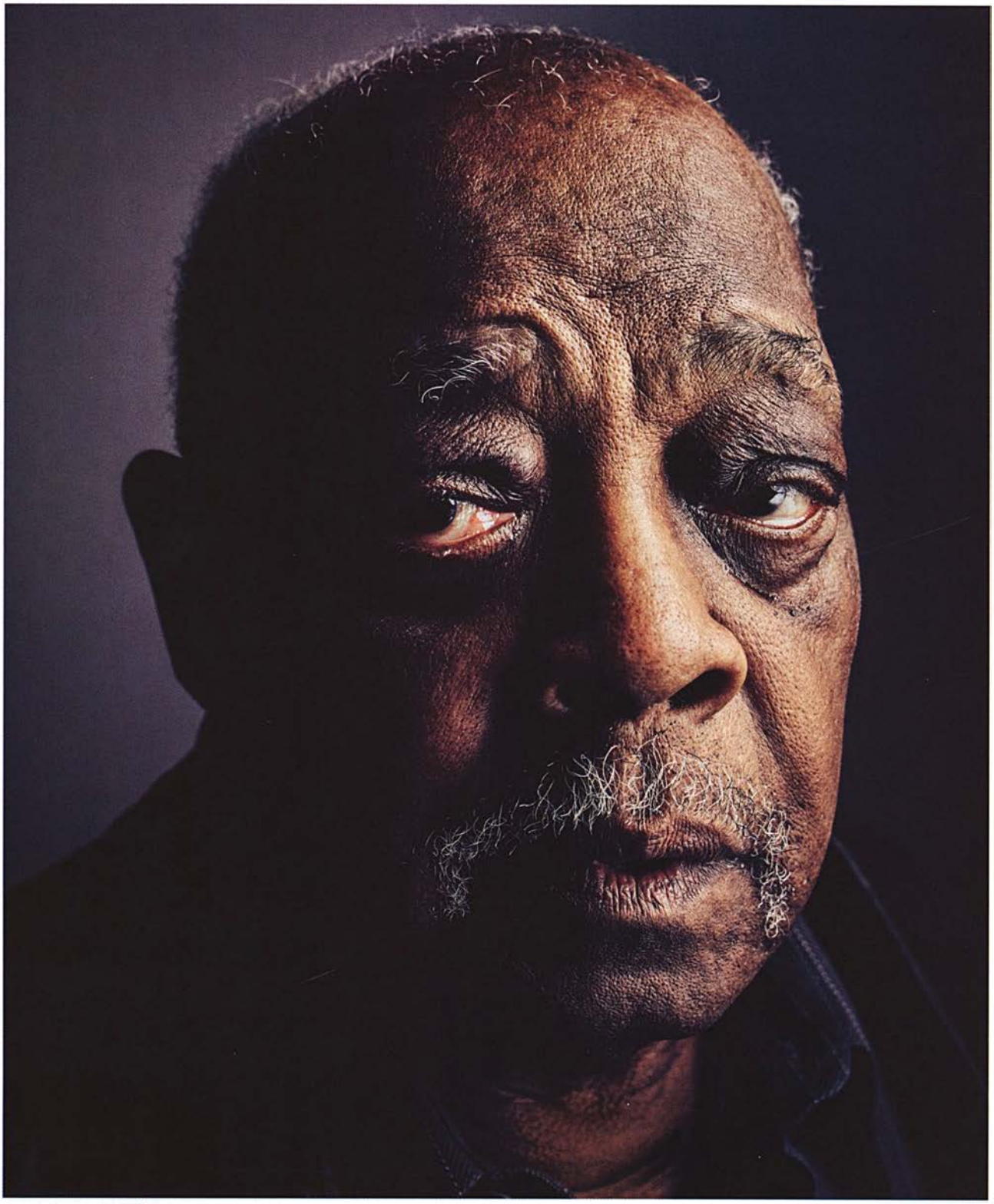
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **WOJTEK URBANEK**
TEXT BY **THOMAS HAUSER**



JIMMY GLENN

THE FACE OF BOXING

Trainers are teachers.

Jimmy Glenn, who died earlier this year at age 89, was one of the most beloved people in boxing. A fixture on the New York boxing scene for seven decades, he fought Floyd Patterson in the amateurs, taught hundreds of kids how to box, worked countless pro corners and owned a blue-collar bar called Jimmy's Corner two blocks from Times Square.

Virgil Hunter began training Andre Ward when Ward was 9 years old and was in Andre's corner until the end of his pro career. Hunter has also worked with Demetrius Andrade, Amir Khan and Andre Berto. But Ward is his masterpiece.

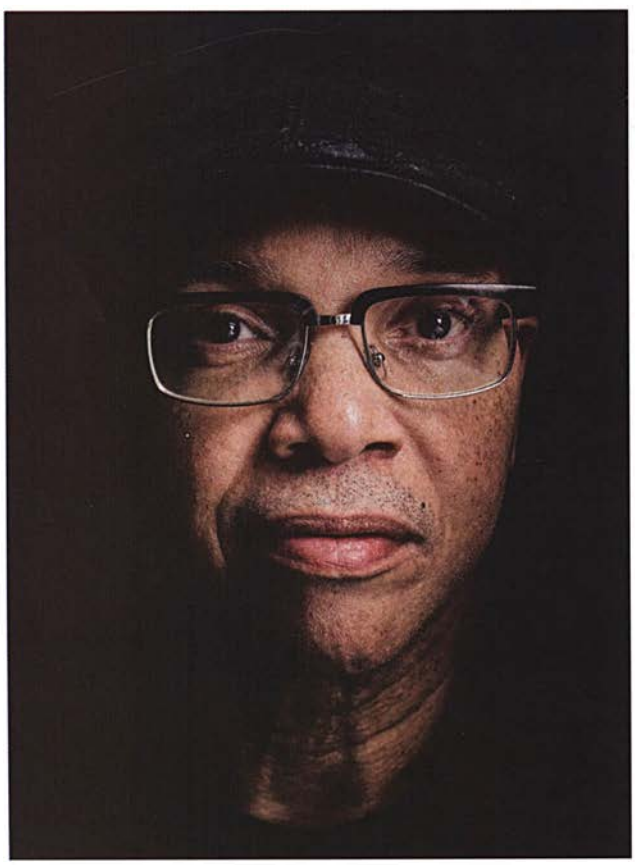
Harry Keitt has spent decades training fighters in New York, hoping for an alliance that will bring him to the top. He came close with Irish middleweight John Duddy. Then he brought Jarrell Miller to the verge of a $6.5 million payday for a fight against Anthony Joshua, only to see the walls come tumbling down when Miller tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs.

"I photographed Jimmy Glenn at the Boxing Writers [Association of America] dinner in New York," Wojtek Urbanek recalls. "He was an older man by then, not as strong as he once was. It was an effort for him to move around. But he had such a kind presence. And there was so much history in his face. His face was a wonderful landscape.

"With Virgil Hunter, I was waiting to photograph Canelo Alvarez in a corridor at the MGM Grand Garden Arena right before he weighed in for the [Sergey] Kovalev fight. And someone brought Virgil over to me. There was very little interaction between us. He sat down in front of the camera. He was gracious and polite. It was like a bonus photograph for me.

"I met Harry Keitt at a press conference in New York," Urbanek continues. "As a photographer, you work with different types of faces. When I put my camera to my eye to photograph Harry, I saw things that I hadn't seen at first. He has a great face to work with. I saw character and a lot of strength in him." RING

Wojtek Urbanek is based in New York and can be reached at studio@wojtekurbanek.com. Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com.



VIRGIL HUNTER

HARRY KEITT

RATINGS

SUMMARY ★ ANALYSIS

The Ring Ratings through fights of December 12, 2020

Joe Joyce remained undefeated with an upset KO of Daniel Dubois.

RECENT FIGHT RESULTS AND CHANGES IN THE RING'S DIVISIONAL RANKINGS

BY BRIAN HARTY

HEAVYWEIGHT: Just outside the ratings, Olympic gold medalist Tony Yoka went the 10-round distance for the first time, winning a comfortable decision over veteran Christian Hammer, while Daniel Dubois was upset by fellow Brit Joe Joyce. Dubois took some flak from the "go out on your shield" crowd for his decision to surrender with a damaged eye in Round 10, but the Ratings Panel focused on praise for Joyce, who inched closer to a ranking.

After the tedious caution he showed in a rematch with Andy Ruiz Jr., Anthony Joshua (No. 1) was back in dominating form with a ninth-round knockout of Kubrat Pulev, scoring a total of four knockdowns. Pulev (No. 10 last month) was replaced in the ratings by former cruiserweight champion Aleksandr Usyk, though there was the suggestion to draft Joyce instead.

CRUISERWEIGHT: Michal Cieslak (No. 10) stayed put after chopping down Taylor Mabika (unrated) with a body shot in the sixth round. Lawrence Okolie (No. 6) also held his rank after a second-round stoppage of unrated Nikodem Jezewski

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: After a tough run of two losses and a draw, Badou Jack needed some good news of any kind, which he got with an eight-round shutout of Blake McKernan (unrated). The Vegas-based Swede remained at No. 6. Anthony Yarde dropped off the list from his No. 9 spot after losing an upset split decision to the undefeated Lyndon Arthur, who entered at No. 10.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Daniel Jacobs remained at No. 10 after a passionless split decision over Gabriel Rosado (unrated), leading more than one panelist to wonder about the current location of Jacobs' head. Martin Murray (unrated), another fighter who hasn't looked quite the same since encountering Gennadiy Golovkin, didn't seem to have a chance against Billy Joe Saunders in early December and hinted at retirement afterward. Saunders retained his WBO belt and position at No. 5 in the ratings.

WELTERWEIGHT: Kell Brook (unrated) was the victim of another brutal stoppage at the hands of a pound-for-pounder, this time from Terence Crawford in the fourth round. Crawford (No. 2) started slow and turned malicious, as usual, knocking the former U.K. sensation across and nearly out of the ring with an improbably short right and then finishing him with a flurry of bombs. Crawford stayed put at No. 2 underneath Errol Spence Jr.

Three weeks later in Texas, Spence had his first post-crash fight and beat Danny Garcia by unanimous decision. Said one panelist: "Errol Spence convinced me; I thought Garcia could sneak a split decision win, but he never looked in the fight. Spence lost none of his timing or reflexes and seems to have kept every athletic component as well." Garcia slipped from No. 6 to No. 7.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: Shohjahon Ergashev kept his perfect record intact and held his No. 10 rank with a second-round stoppage of Dzmitry Miliusha (unrated).

LIGHTWEIGHT: Javier Fortuna remained at No. 7 after a sixth-round knockout of Antonio Lozada (unrated) – a solid win but not enough to jump Robert Easter, who won a split decision over Fortuna in 2018. Emmanuel Tagoe initially stayed put at No. 10 after a majority decision over Mason Menard (unrated), but the Ghanaian was replaced by Masayoshi Nakatani, who recovered from two knockdowns to stop Felix Verdejo (unrated) in the ninth round.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: O'Shaquie Foster entered the ratings at No. 10 after an impressive ninth-round knockout of Miguel Roman, who exited the list from No. 9. Three weeks later, Foster and Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov (then No. 9) were pushed out as Shakur Stevenson and Chris Colbert entered at Nos. 7 and 8, respectively. Stevenson's 10-round shutout of Toka Kahn Clary (unrated) prompted one member of the panel to say, "I believe Stevenson may well be the best 130-pounder in the world, and 2021 promises to be a big year for him." Colbert was pitching a near-shutout when he finished Jaime Arboleda (unrated) in Round 11.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: In what one panelist called "the lowest point of the year," No. 8-rated Andrew Moloney thought he'd scored a second-round stoppage of Joshua Franco, but he was denied the victory after referee Russell Mora decided Franco's eye had been damaged beyond acceptable limits by a phantom headbutt and ruled the bout a no-contest. Instant replays somehow couldn't DISprove the decision, so it was upheld. Some Ratings Panel members were in favor of promoting Moloney regardless, but that didn't happen.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Agustin Gauto moved from No. 10 to No. 9 after an expeditious knockout of Juan Jurado (unrated) in Argentina. Texas prospect Jesse Rodriguez then replaced Daniel Matellon at No. 10 with a second-round knockout of former title challenger Saul Juarez.

STRAWWEIGHT: Wanheng Menayothin's epic run finally came to an end on November 27, with the 35-year-old losing for the first time in his 55-fight career. The spoiler was fellow Thai fighter Petchmanee CP Freshmart (aka Panya Pradabsri), who won a close unanimous decision to take the WBC title. He also entered the ratings at No. 2, pushing out No. 10-rated Nkosinathi Joyi, while Menayothin dropped from No. 1 to No. 3.

P4P

1. **CANELO ALVAREZ**
   Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
2. **NAOYA INOUE**
   Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
3. **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
   U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
4. **ALEKSANDR USYK**
   Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)
5. **ERROL SPENCE JR.**
   U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
6. **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
   U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
7. **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
   Ukraine • 14-2-0 (12 KOs)
8. **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA**
   Mexico • 41-3-0 (28 KOs)
9. **JOSH TAYLOR**
   U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
10. **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN**
    Kazakhstan • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)

Errol Spence Jr. maintained his No. 5 position on the mythical pound-for-pound list thanks to his dominant win over Danny Garcia.

RONALD MARTINEZ

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

- C **TYSON FURY** RING, WBC
  U.K. • 30-0-1 (21 KOs)
- 1 **ANTHONY JOSHUA** IBF, WBA, WBO
  U.K. • 24-1-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **DEONTAY WILDER**
  U.S. • 42-1-1 (41 KOs)
- 3 **ALEXANDER POVETKIN**
  Russia • 36-2-1 (25 KOs)
- 4 **DILLIAN WHYTE**
  U.K. • 27-2-0 (18 KOs)
- 5 **LUIS ORTIZ**
  Cuba • 32-2-0 (27 KOs)
- 6 **ANDY RUIZ JR.**
  U.S. • 33-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 7 **JOSEPH PARKER**
  New Zealand • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
- 8 **MICHAEL HUNTER**
  U.S. • 18-1-1 (12 KOs)
- 9 **OSCAR RIVAS**
  Colombia • 26-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 10 **ALEKSANDR USYK**
  Ukraine • 18-0-0 (13 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

- C **MAIRIS BRIEDIS** RING, IBF
  Latvia • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 1 **YUNIEL DORTICOS**
  Cuba • 24-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **ILUNGA MAKABU** WBC
  Congo • 27-2-0 (24 KOs)
- 3 **KRZYSZTOF GLOWACKI**
  Poland • 31-2-0 (19 KOs)
- 4 **KEVIN LERENA**
  S. Africa • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)
- 5 **ANDREW TABITI**
  U.S. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **LAWRENCE OKOLIE**
  U.K. • 15-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 7 **ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN** WBA
  France • 26-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 8 **THABISO MCHUNU**
  S. Africa • 22-5-0 (13 KOs)
- 9 **ALEKSEI PAPIN**
  Russia • 12-1-0 (11 KOs)
- 10 **MICHAL CIESLAK**
  Poland • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ARTUR BETERBIEV** IBF, WBC
  Russia • 15-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 2 **DMITRY BIVOL** WBA
  Russia • 17-0-0 (11 KOs)
- 3 **SERGEY KOVALEV**
  Russia • 34-4-1 (29 KOs)
- 4 **JOE SMITH JR.**
  U.S. • 26-3-0 (21 KOs)
- 5 **JEAN PASCAL**
  Canada • 35-6-1 (20 KOs)
- 6 **BADOU JACK**
  Sweden • 23-3-3 (13 KOs)
- 7 **ELEIDER ALVAREZ**
  Colombia • 25-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 8 **MARCUS BROWNE**
  U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 9 **UMAR SALAMOV**
  Russia • 25-1-0 (19 KOs)
- 10 **LYNDON ARTHUR**
  U.K. • 18-0-0 (12 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

- C **CALLUM SMITH** RING, WBA
  U.K. • 27-0-0 (19 KOs)
- 1 **DAVID BENAVIDEZ**
  U.S. • 23-0-0 (20 KOs)
- 2 **CALEB PLANT** IBF
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 3 **ANTHONY DIRRELL**
  U.S. • 33-2-1 (24 KOs)
- 4 **CANELO ALVAREZ**
  Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
- 5 **BILLY JOE SAUNDERS** WBO
  U.K. • 30-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 6 **CALEB TRUAX**
  U.S. • 31-4-2 (19 KOs)
- 7 **JOHN RYDER**
  U.K. • 28-5-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **FEDOR CHUDINOV**
  Russia • 23-2-0 (16 KOs)
- 9 **DAVID LEMIEUX**
  Canada • 42-4-0 (35 KOs)
- 10 **DANIEL JACOBS**
  U.S. • 37-3-0 (30 KOs)

RATINGS

Through fights of December 12, 2020

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

- C **CANELO ALVAREZ** RING, WBA
  Mexico • 53-1-2 (36 KOs)
- 1 **GENNADIY GOLOVKIN** IBF
  Kaz. • 40-1-1 (35 KOs)
- 2 **JERMALL CHARLO** WBC
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (22 KOs)
- 3 **DEMETRIUS ANDRADE** WBO
  U.S. • 29-0-0 (18 KOs)
- 4 **SERGIY DEREVYANCHENKO**
  Ukraine • 13-3-0 (10 KOs)
- 5 **RYOTA MURATA**
  Japan • 16-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 6 **KAMIL SZEREMETA**
  Poland • 21-0-0 (5 KOs)
- 7 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
  U.K. • 29-2-0 (22 KOs)
- 8 **ROB BRANT**
  U.S. • 26-2-0 (18 KOs)
- 9 **LIAM WILLIAMS**
  U.K. • 23-2-1 (18 KOs)
- 10 **JAIME MUNGUIA**
  Mexico • 36-0-0 (29 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

- C **JERMELL CHARLO** RING, WBC, IBF, WBA
  U.S. • 34-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 1 **JARRETT HURD**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 2 **ERISLANDY LARA**
  Cuba • 27-3-3 (15 KOs)
- 3 **JEISON ROSARIO**
  Dom. Rep. • 20-2-1 (14 KOs)
- 4 **JULIAN WILLIAMS**
  U.S. • 27-2-1 (16 KOs)
- 5 **BRIAN CASTANO**
  Argentina • 16-0-1 (12 KOs)
- 6 **TONY HARRISON**
  U.S. • 28-3-0 (21 KOs)
- 7 **ERICKSON LUBIN**
  U.S. • 23-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 8 **MICHEL SORO**
  France • 35-2-1 (24 KOs)
- 9 **PATRICK TEIXEIRA** WBO
  Brazil • 31-1-0 (22 KOs)
- 10 **TIM TSZYU**
  Australia • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **ERROL SPENCE JR.** IBF, WBC
  U.S. • 27-0-0 (21 KOs)
- 2 **TERENCE CRAWFORD** WBO
  U.S. • 37-0-0 (28 KOs)
- 3 **MANNY PACQUIAO** WBA
  Phil. • 62-7-2 (39 KOs)
- 4 **KEITH THURMAN**
  U.S. • 29-1-0 (22 KOs)
- 5 **SHAWN PORTER**
  U.S. • 31-3-1 (17 KOs)
- 6 **YORDENIS UGAS**
  Cuba • 26-4-0 (12 KOs)
- 7 **DANNY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 36-3-0 (21 KOs)
- 8 **KUDRATILLO ABDUKAKHOROV**
  Uzbekistan • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 9 **SERGEY LIPINETS**
  Russia • 16-1-1 (12 KOs)
- 10 **MIKEY GARCIA**
  U.S. • 40-1-0 (30 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

- C **JOSH TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA
  U.K. • 17-0-0 (13 KOs)
- 1 **JOSE RAMIREZ** WBC, WBO
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 2 **REGIS PROGRAIS**
  U.S. • 25-1-0 (21 KOs)
- 3 **JOSE ZEPEDA**
  U.S. • 33-2-0 (26 KOs)
- 4 **VIKTOR POSTOL**
  Ukraine • 31-3-0 (12 KOs)
- 5 **ARNOLD BARBOZA**
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 6 **IVAN BARANCHYK**
  Russia • 20-2-0 (13 KOs)
- 7 **MARIO BARRIOS**
  U.S. • 26-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 8 **KIRYL RELIKH**
  Belarus • 23-3-0 (19 KOs)
- 9 **BATYRZHAN JUKEMBAYEV**
  Kazakhstan • 18-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 10 **SHOHJAHON ERGASHEV**
  Uzbekistan • 19-0-0 (17 KOs)

Badou Jack (right) stayed busy with a points win over the unknown Blake McKernan at cruiserweight, but the No. 6-rated 175-pounder has unfinished business against Jean Pascal, who he will face again in 2021.

Commonwealth light heavyweight champion Lyndon Arthur (right) shocked pre-fight favorite Anthony Yarde to post a career-best triumph and displaced his countryman at No. 10 in the 175-pound ratings.

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

- C **TEOFIMO LOPEZ** RING, WBA, WBO, IBF
  U.S. • 16-0-0 (12 KOs)
- 1 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
  Ukraine • 14-2-0 (10 KOs)
- 2 **DEVIN HANEY** WBC
  U.S. • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)
- 3 **RICHARD COMMEY**
  Ghana • 29-3-0 (26 KOs)
- 4 **LUKE CAMPBELL**
  U.K. • 20-3-0 (16 KOs)
- 5 **RYAN GARCIA**
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)
- 6 **ROBERT EASTER**
  U.S. • 22-1-1 (14 KOs)
- 7 **JAVIER FORTUNA**
  Dom. Rep. • 36-2-1 (25 KOs)
- 8 **JORGE LINARES**
  Venezuela • 47-5-0 (29 KOs)
- 9 **GEORGE KAMBOSOS JR.**
  Australia • 19-0-0 (10 KOs)
- 10 **MASAYOSHI NAKATANI**
  Japan • 19-1-0 (13 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

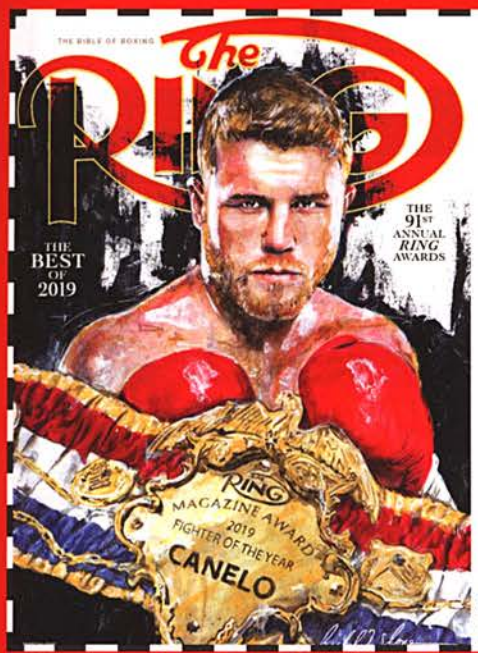
- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **MIGUEL BERCHELT** WBC
  Mexico • 37-1-0 (33 KOs)
- 2 **GERVONTA DAVIS** WBA
  U.S. • 24-0-0 (23 KOs)
- 3 **JOSEPH DIAZ JR.** IBF
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (15 KOs)
- 4 **JAMEL HERRING** WBO
  U.S. • 22-2-0 (10 KOs)
- 5 **TEVIN FARMER**
  U.S. • 30-5-1 (6 KOs)
- 6 **RENE ALVARADO**
  Nicaragua • 32-8-0 (21 KOs)
- 7 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (8 KOs)
- 8 **CHRIS COLBERT**
  U.S. • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)
- 9 **MASAYUKI ITO**
  Japan • 26-2-1 (14 KOs)
- 10 **ANDREW CANCIO**
  U.S. • 21-5-2 (16 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **JOSH WARRINGTON** IBF
  U.K. • 30-0-0 (7 KOs)
- 2 **GARY RUSSELL JR.** WBC
  U.S. • 31-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 3 **XU CAN** WBA
  China • 18-2-0 (3 KOs)
- 4 **KID GALAHAD**
  U.K. • 27-1-0 (16 KOs)
- 5 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE** WBO
  Mexico • 32-1-0 (27 KOs)
- 6 **MARK MAGSAYO**
  Phil. • 21-0-0 (14 KOs)
- 7 **TUGSTSOGT NYAMBAYAR**
  Mongolia • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)
- 8 **JESSIE MAGDALENO**
  U.S. • 28-1-0 (18 KOs)
- 9 **JOET GONZALEZ**
  U.S. • 24-1-0 (14 KOs)
- 10 **RUBEN VILLA**
  U.S. • 18-1-0 (5 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

- C **(VACANT)**
- 1 **REY VARGAS**
  Mexico • 34-0-0 (22 KOs)
- 2 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV** IBF, WBA
  Uzbekistan • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
- 3 **DANIEL ROMAN**
  U.S. • 28-3-1 (10 KOs)
- 4 **RYOSUKE IWASA**
  Japan • 27-3-0 (17 KOs)
- 5 **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
  U.S. • 21-0-1 (16 KOs)
- 6 **ANGELO LEO** WBO
  U.S. • 20-0-0 (9 KOs)
- 7 **HIROAKI TESHIGAWARA**
  Japan • 22-2-2 (15 KOs)
- 8 **TOMOKI KAMEDA**
  Japan • 36-3-0 (20 KOs)
- 9 **AZAT HOVHANNISYAN**
  Armenia • 18-3-0 (15 KOs)
- 10 **STEPHEN FULTON**
  U.S. • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)



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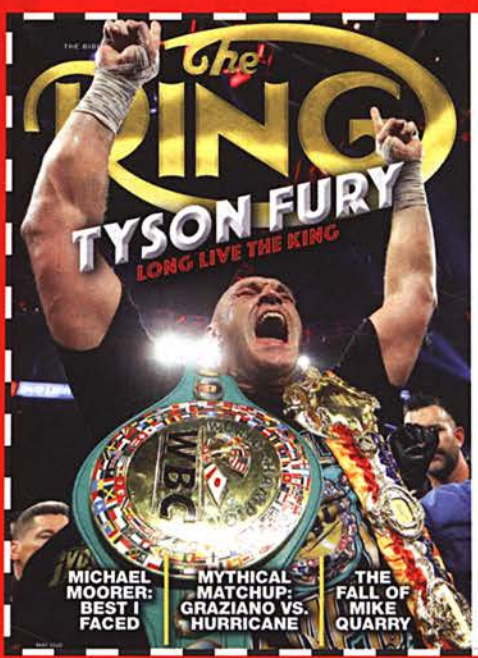

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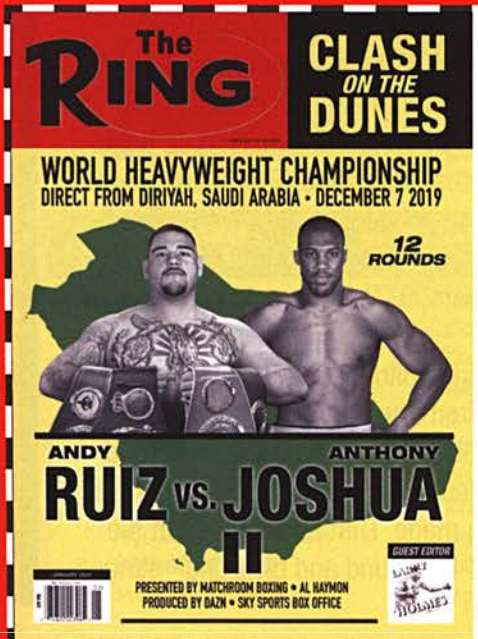

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RATINGS

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **NAOYA INOUE** RING, IBF, WBA
Japan • 20-0-0 (17 KOs)

1 **NONITO DONAIRE**
Phil. • 40-6-0 (26 KOs)

2 **NORDINE OUBAALI** WBC
France • 17-0-0 (12 KOs)

3 **JOHN RIEL CASIMERO** WBO
Philippines • 30-4–0 (21 KOs)

4 **EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ**
P.R. • 19-1-0 (12 KOs)

5 **ZOLANI TETE**
S. Africa • 28-4-0 (21 KOs)

6 **TAKUMA INOUE**
Japan • 13-1-0 (3 KOs)

7 **JASON MOLONEY**
Australia • 21-2-0 (18 KOs)

8 **GUILLERMO RIGONDEAUX**
Cuba • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)

9 **OSCAR NEGRETE**
U.S. • 19-2-2 (7 KOs)

10 **MIKE PLANIA**
Philippines • 24-1–0 (12 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA** RING, WBC
Mexico • 41-3-0 (28 KOs)

1 **SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI**
Thailand • 49-5-1 (42 KOs)

2 **ROMAN GONZALEZ** WBA
Nicaragua • 50-2-0 (41 KOs)

3 **KAZUTO IOKA** WBO
Japan • 25-2-0 (14 KOs)

4 **JERWIN ANCAJAS** IBF
Phil. • 32-1-2 (22 KOs)

5 **KHALID YAFAI**
U.K. • 26-1-0 (15 KOs)

6 **JOSHUA FRANCO**
U.S. • 17-1-2 (8 KOs)

7 **FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.**
Mexico • 33-4-1 (24 KOs)

8 **ANDREW MOLONEY**
Australia • 21-1-0 (14 KOs)

9 **JEYVIER CINTRON**
P.R. • 11-1-0 (5 KOs)

10 **CARLOS CUADRAS**
Mexico • 39-4-1 (27 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **KOSEI TANAKA**
Japan • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)

2 **MORUTI MTHALANE** IBF
S. Africa • 39-2-0 (26 KOs)

3 **JULIO CESAR MARTINEZ** WBC
Mexico • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)

4 **ARTEM DALAKIAN** WBA
Ukraine • 20-0-0 (14 KOs)

5 **JUNTO NAKATANI**
Japan • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)

6 **MASAYUKI KURODA**
Japan • 30-8-3 (16 KOs)

7 **CRISTOFER ROSALES**
Nicaragua • 31-5-0 (21 KOs)

8 **JAY HARRIS**
U.K. • 18-1-0 (9 KOs)

9 **ANGEL ACOSTA**
Puerto Rico • 21-2-0 (21 KOs)

10 **JOSELITO VELAZQUEZ**
Mexico • 12-0-0 (9 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **HIROTO KYOGUCHI** RING, WBA
Japan • 14-0-0 (9 KOs)

1 **KENSHIRO TERAJI** WBC
Japan • 17-0-0 (10 KOs)

2 **HEKKIE BUDLER**
S. Africa • 32-4-0 (10 KOs)

3 **CARLOS CANIZALES**
Venezuela • 22-0-1 (17 KOs)

4 **FELIX ALVARADO** IBF
Nicaragua • 35-2-0 (30 KOs)

5 **ELWIN SOTO** WBO
Mexico • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)

6 **TETSUYA HISADA**
Japan • 34-10-2 (20 KOs)

7 **EDWARD HENO**
Phil. • 14-1-5 (5 KOs)

8 **SHO KIMURA**
Japan • 19-3-2 (12 KOs)

9 **AGUSTIN GAUTO**
Argentina • 15-0-0 (10 KOs)

10 **JESSE RODRIGUEZ**
U.S. • 13-0-0 (9 KOs)

No. 5-rated super middleweight Billy Joe Saunders (left) retained his WBO title by outpointing Martin Murray.

No. 10-rated super middleweight Daniel Jacobs (right) won few fans in a lackluster decision win over Gabriel Rosado.

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART** WBA
Thailand • 21-0-0 (7 KOs)

2 **PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART** WBC
Thailand • 35-1-0 (22 KOs)

3 **WANHENG MENAYOTHIN**
Thailand • 54-1-0 (18 KOs)

4 **WILFREDO MENDEZ** WBO
Puerto Rico • 16-1-0 (6 KOs)

5 **BYRON ROJAS**
Nicaragua • 27-4-3 (11 KOs)

6 **VIC SALUDAR**
Phil. • 20-4-0 (11 KOs)

7 **JOSE ARGUMEDO**
Mexico • 23-4-1 (14 KOs)

8 **SIMPIWE KONKCO**
S. Africa • 19-6-0 (7 KOs)

9 **PEDRO TADURAN** IBF
Phil. • 14-2-1 (11 KOs)

10 **MELVIN JERUSALEM**
Phil. • 15-2-0 (9 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
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Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

WOMEN'S RATINGS

Through fights of Dec. 12, 2020

POUND FOR POUND

1 **KATIE TAYLOR**
U.K. • 17-0-0 (6 KOs)

2 **CLARESSA SHIELDS**
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)

3 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-1-0 (9 KOs)

4 **JESSICA MCCASKILL**
U.S. • 9-2-0 (3 KOs)

5 **AMANDA SERRANO**
Puerto Rico • 38-1-1 (28 KOs)

6 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)

7 **YESICA BOPP**
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)

8 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ**
Argentina • 29-3-3 (10 KOs)

9 **MARCELA ACUNA**
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)

10 **MIKAELA MAYER**
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ELIN CEDERROOS** IBF, WBA
Sweden • 8-0-0 (4 KOs)
2 **FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 6-1-0 (2 KOs)
3 **ALICIA NAPOLEON ESPINOSA**
U.S. • 12-2-0 (7 KOs)
4 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)
5 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHT
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **CLARESSA SHIELDS** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
1 **CHRISTINA HAMMER**
Germany • 25-1-0 (11 KOs)
2 **TORI NELSON**
U.S. • 20-2-3 (4 KOs)
3 **SAVANNAH MARSHALL**
U.K. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **TAYLA HARRIS**
Australia • 7-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **EMA KOZIN**
Slovenia • 20-0-1 (10 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CLARESSA SHIELDS** WBC, WBO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (2 KOs)
2 **MARIE EVE DICAIRE** IBF
Canada • 17-0-0 (0 KOs)
3 **HANNA GABRIELS** WBA
Costa Rica • 20-2-1 (11 KOs)
4 **MIKAELA LAUREN**
Sweden • 32-6-0 (13 KOs)
5 **CHRIS NAMUS**
Uruguay • 25-6-0 (8 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **JESSICA MCCASKILL** IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.S. • 9-2-0 (3 KOs)
2 **CECILIA BRAEKHUS**
Norway • 36-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **LAYLA MCCARTER**
U.S. • 44-13-5 (11 KOs)
4 **ORNELLA DOMINI**
Switzerland • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
5 **VICTORIA BUSTOS**
Argentina • 19-6-0 (0 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA LINARDATOU** WBO
Greece • 13-2-0 (6 KOs)
2 **MARY MCGEE** IBF
U.S. • 27-3-0 (15 KOs)
3 **CHANTELLE CAMERON** WBC
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
4 **ERICA FARIAS**
Argentina • 26-4-0 (10 KOs)
5 **KALI REIS** WBA
U.S. • 17-7-1 (5 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **KATIE TAYLOR** RING, IBF, WBA, WBC, WBO
U.K. • 17-0-0 (6 KOs)
1 **DELFINE PERSOON**
Belgium • 44-3-0 (18 KOs)
2 **CHANTELLE CAMERON**
U.K. • 13-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 **ESTELLE MOSSELY**
Belgium • 8-0-0 (1 KOs)
4 **MIRIAM GUTIERREZ**
Spain • 13-1-0 (5 KOs)
5 **NICOLE WESNER**
Germany • 16-0-0 (7 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **TERRI HARPER** WBC
U.K. • 11-0-1 (6 KOs)
2 **MAIVA HAMADOUCHE** IBF
France • 21-1-0 (17 KOs)
3 **MIKAELA MAYER** WBO
U.S. • 14-0-0 (5 KOs)
4 **HYUN MI CHOI** WBA
South Korea • 17-0-1 (4 KOs)
5 **EWA BRODNICKA**
Poland • 19-1-0 (2 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **AMANDA SERRANO** WBO
Puerto Rico • 38-1-1 (28 KOs)
2 **JELENA MRDJIENOVICH** WBA, WBC
Canada • 40-10-2 (19 KOs)
3 **SARAH MAHFOUD**
Denmark • 10-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 **HEATHER HARDY**
U.S. • 22-1-0 (4 KOs)
5 **JENNIFER HAN** IBF
U.S. • 18-3-1 (1 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MARCELA ACUNA** IBF
Argentina • 49-7-2 (20 KOs)
2 **JACKIE NAVA**
Mexico • 36-4-4 (16 KOs)
3 **DANIELA BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 29-3-3 (10 KOs)
4 **MAYERLIN RIVAS** WBA
Venezuela • 16-4-2 (10 KOs)
5 **DINA THORSLUND** WBO
Denmark • 15-0-0 (6 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **ZULINA MUNOZ**
Mexico • 52-3-2 (30 KOs)
2 **MARIA CECILIA ROMAN** IBF
Argentina • 15-4-1 (0 KOs)
3 **DEBORA DIONICIUS**
Argentina • 30-2-0 (6 KOs)
4 **YULIHAN LUNA AVILA** WBC
Mexico • 20-3-1 (3 KOs)
5 **MARIANA JUAREZ**
Mexico • 54-10-4 (18 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **LOURDES JUAREZ** WBC
Mexico • 31-2-0 (4 KOs)
2 **GUADALUPE MARTINEZ**
Mexico • 20-10-0 (6 KOs)
3 **JESSICA CHAVEZ**
Mexico • 30-5-3 (4 KOs)
4 **DIANA FERNANDEZ**
Mexico • 22-3-0 (4 KOs)
5 **ESMERALDA MORENO**
Mexico • 35-12-2 (11 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **NAOKO FUJIOKA** WBA
Japan • 18-2-1 (7 KOs)
2 **ARELY MUCINO** WBO
Mexico • 28-3-2 (10 KOs)
3 **AVA KNIGHT**
U.S. • 19-2-5 (5 KOs)
4 **MARLEN ESPARZA**
U.S. • 8-1-0 (1 KOs)
5 **IBETH ZAMORA** WBC
Mexico • 31-6-0 (12 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **YESICA BOPP** WBA
Argentina • 36-1-0 (16 KOs)
2 **KENIA ENRIQUEZ**
Mexico • 23-1-0 (9 KOs)
3 **TSUNAMI TENKAI** WBO
Japan • 27-12-1 (16 KOs)
4 **EVELYN BERMUDEZ** IBF
Argentina • 13-0-1 (3 KOs)
5 **SENIESA ESTRADA**
Mexico • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **CHRISTINA RUPPRECHT** WBC
Germany • 10-0-1 (3 KOs)
2 **ANABEL ORTIZ** WBA
Mexico • 31-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 **YOKASTA VALLE** IBF
Nicaragua • 20-2-0 (9 KOs)
4 **ETSUKO TADA**
Japan • 20-3-3 (7 KOs)
5 **KATIA GUTIERREZ**
Mexico • 23-7-0 (6 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**
1 **MONSERRAT ALARCON** WBA
Mexico • 14-4-2 (0 KOs)
2 **SAEMI HANAGATA** IBF
Japan • 16-7-4 (7 KOs)
3 **FABIANA BYTYQI** WBC
Czech Rep. • 16-0-1 (5 KOs)
4 **MIKA IWAKAWA** WBO
Japan • 10-5-1 (3 KOs)
5 **NAO IKEYAMA**
Japan • 18-6-4 (5 KOs)

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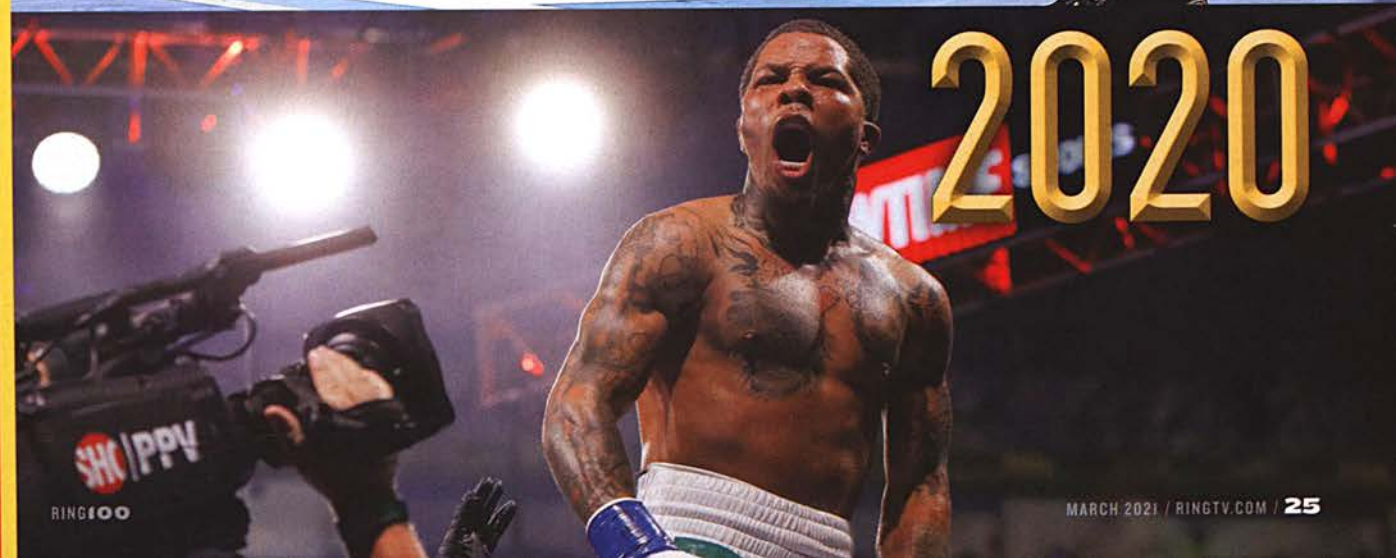
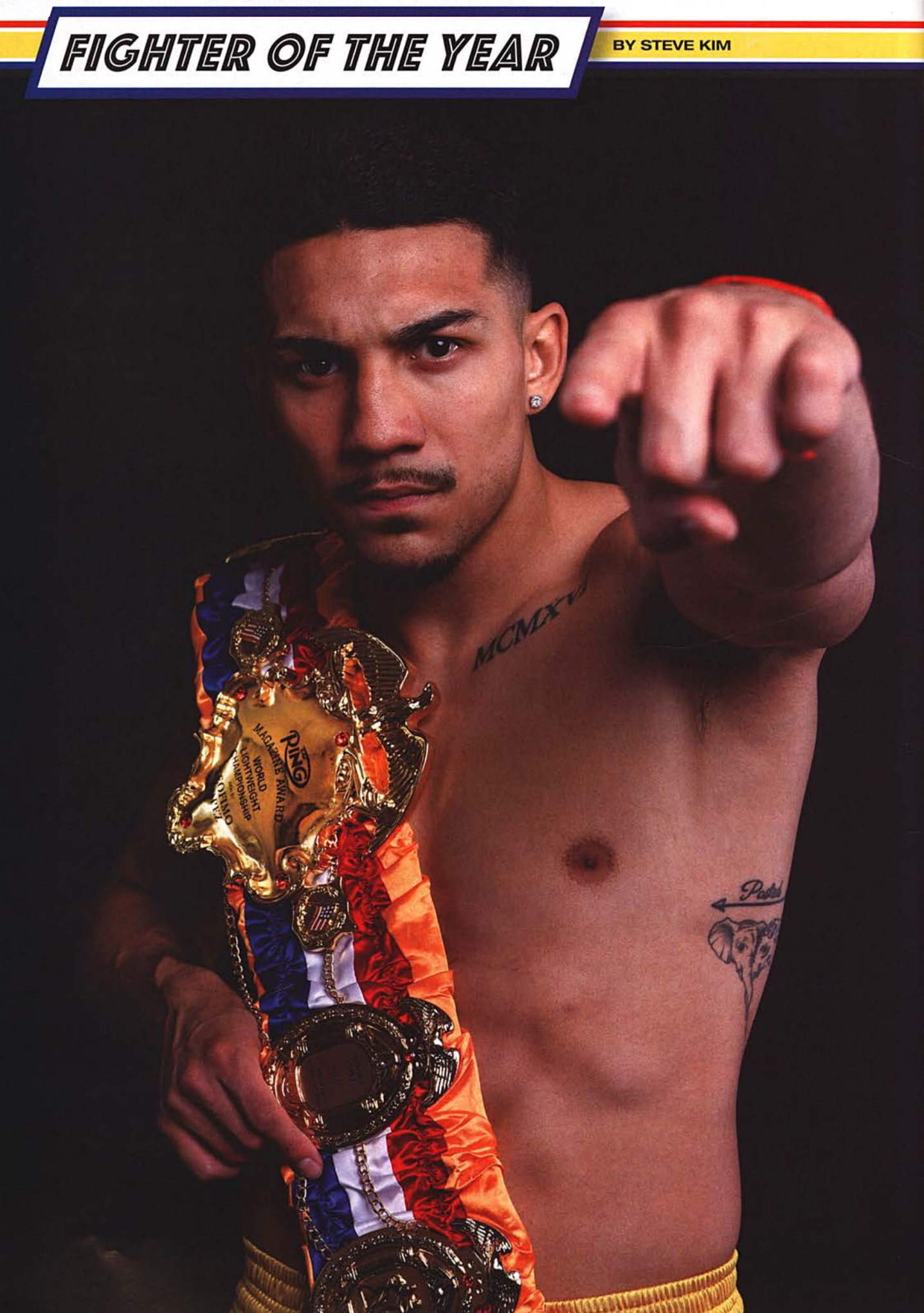


FURY: BRADLEY COLLYER; LOPEZ: MATTHEW HEASLEY; BARANCHYK: MIKEY WILLIAMS/DAVIS; ESTER LIN

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

BY STEVE KIM



TEOFIMO LOPEZ

Despite much of the 2020 boxing schedule being expunged by the COVID-19 pandemic, there were still a good number of major fights that took place this past year. Yet no victory was as impactful or as important as Teofimo Lopez's unanimous decision over Vasiliy Lomachenko on October 17 at the MGM Grand Conference Center in Las Vegas.

While he only had one fight in 2020, Lopez made it count, which is why the 23-year-old lightweight is The Ring Magazine's Co-Fighter of the Year.

Lopez (16-0, 12 KOs) captured the IBF lightweight title by blasting the normally durable Richard Commey out in two explosive rounds last December. But in Lomachenko, he wasn't just facing a unified champion; he was facing a man considered by many observers to be the best boxer in the sport.

In an era where young hopefuls are oftentimes judiciously guided away from the sternest challenges, Lopez and his father/trainer, Teofimo Sr., ran headfirst into a showdown that they had forecast when Lopez was still just a burgeoning prospect.

Their prophecy was that they would win their first major belt in their 15th fight and then topple Lomachenko in their next outing. They may have been the only ones to have faith in this vision.

"I don't believe anyone else did," Lopez told The Ring in early December. "There were a few that may have, but no one could understand what me and my father were talking about, absolutely not. I think everyone thought that we were just crazy – especially my father. But that's the thing about life: Sometimes you've got to be crazy. Sometimes you've got to dream big and think big to make those dreams come true and turn them into reality."

Lopez's promoter, Bob Arum, admitted that while he believed their sincerity, "I wasn't sure if they knew what they were doing."

What seemed to turn off some is that Team Lopez didn't just have the temerity to challenge Lomachenko, but also the hubris to really believe they could actually beat him. At times, Lopez and his outspoken (to say the least) father were downright disrespectful of a fighter that many others were awed by. The stylish Ukrainian had lost all of two

The newly crowned Ring champion enjoys the fruits of his labor after a brilliant victory over Lomachenko.

MCMXVI
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boxing matches throughout his storied amateur and professional boxing career.

After a somewhat contentious period of negotiation, where the overall pot of money for both sides was lessened without a live gate to be had, Lopez made the decision to take this fight, regardless of his dissatisfaction with the financial terms. "Sometimes you have to risk, and sometimes you have to lose money in order to make money," he explained. "That's an investment in myself. And my father, he invested in me and our work ethic."

During the summer, Lomachenko-Lopez was announced. It would take place in the "crowdless" and sterile setting of The Bubble at MGM Grand, where Top Rank held all its events in the second half of the year as it resumed operations. It was hailed as the most anticipated bout of the fall boxing slate.

The prevailing thought was that finally the day of reckoning had come for Lopez. That he would be punished for all his brash behavior of the past. Lomachenko wouldn't just defeat him, but discipline him with his typical ruthless precision. Yet throughout the week leading into the fight, Lopez showed an uncommon poise, starting with the final press conference televised nationally on ESPN.

"I wasn't nervous," Lopez insisted. "A lot of people were mentioning how I may have been during the press conference and all that. Honestly, it wasn't that Loma was across from me; the whole thing really was that, 'Why is this turning into a reality show?' So that's the only thing that threw me off. Usually I'm used to a regular press conference, not a reality show. That's what it felt like on that day."

Lopez made it clear: "I don't fear no man. I don't get nervous."

The pre-fight festivities were capped by a heated face-off that broke all social distancing rules in place after the weigh-in. Surely Lopez would start to crack under the immense pressure once he got under the bright lights versus Lomachenko.

But it was Lopez who was controlling the center of the ring, taking immediate tactical control of the proceedings with his fast, spearing jab and quick reflexes that unnerved Lomachenko. In stunning fashion, he wasn't just beating him, but making it look easy. After seven rounds, the argument could be made that he was pitching a shutout.

In looking back, Lopez says he expected more from the amateur legend.

"My expectations for him were so much higher," he said. "It's not that it was easy; it was more of, 'C'mon, where you at? Where is all the hype that everybody talks about? Where is the movement, all the footwork? I need to see that.' But I was laser-focused on him the whole time."

However, to Lomachenko's credit, he did rally in the later rounds, beating Lopez down the middle with sharp left hands that snapped the younger man's head back more than once.

"Those little hiccups that we had" between rounds 8 and 11 is how Lopez described those moments.

But any thoughts of a late comeback were put to rest as Lopez emphatically closed the show in the 12th round, where he ramped up his attack and shook Lomachenko a few times.

"I wanted to go out with a bang," he recalled. "I knew I won the fight, and I could've boxed him, but what's the point in that? I wanted to knock his head off, and I knew I had the chance. I hurt him. I stunned him many times throughout the fight. It was the last round where I really felt, 'This guy's about to take a knee.' And then the headbutts happened, and the ref stopped it for that moment."

As the final bell sounded, it was clear who should have his hands raised in victory. And it was Lopez winning by the scores of 116-112, 119-109 and 117-111. He had shocked the world, if not himself.

"That's the sweet joy about it," said Lopez. "I'm going to continue to prove them wrong, and that comes with every fighter that comes in front of me, that they put in front of me. Best believe I'm going to beat them. And that's it; that's what I enjoy the most."

This was a seismic victory for Lopez. He didn't just become the undisputed lightweight champion; he's now considered a bona fide star who is now ranked sixth in The Ring Magazine's pound-for-pound rankings. At age 23, he is by far the youngest in the elite group. Naoya Inoue (rated second) is the closest to him at 27, and they will be the only two on the list under 30 after Josh Taylor's (rated ninth) birthday on January 2.

To further put into perspective just how far Lopez is ahead of the curve, one need only look to the other young standouts of the lightweight division: Ryan Garcia, Gervonta Davis and Devin Haney. They make up a talented quartet, who many believe represent the new generation that will carry the sport into the next decade. But consider this: Garcia has 20 fights to his credit, Davis has 24, while Haney has 25 under his belt. Lopez has just 16.

So, is Lopez the leader of the new school?

"Are they on the Ring Magazine cover?" was his retort, after claiming his first cover with the February 2021 issue. "I'm not the king of 135. I'm the king of boxing."

We've only seen phase one of "The Takeover," says Lopez. After the biggest victory of his career, he took a week-long vacation in Mexico with his wife and was soon back to working out – even though he did so with a boot on an injured right foot that required surgery following the bout with Lomachenko. He swears complacency is not in his vocabulary.

Currently, Lopez is building his new home in Jonesboro, Arkansas, from the ground up. Every brick and tile will be laid under his direction. This house will take some time to be completed, as will Lopez's career. The win over Lomachenko was just the foundation.

"That's all it is," he insisted. "Now is when we start putting pretty much everything into the house. That's going to come with more fights and tougher opposition that we have in front of us." ★

Up close or at distance, Lopez scored more effectively than any Lomachenko opponent to date.

BY BRIAN HARTY

JOSE ZEPEDA KO 5 IVAN BARANCHYK

In an incredible shootout, Jose Zepeda and Ivan Baranchyk were on the canvas four times apiece.

A five-round fight with eight evenly divided knockdowns is either an embarrassment or a classic. It's the competence and the will of the fighters that decide which distinction is earned.

California native Jose Zepeda came into The Bubble at the MGM Grand on October 3 with two blemishes on his record – one (a majority decision in favor of Jose Ramirez) was the rare example of a losing performance good enough to get a fighter into The Ring's junior welterweight top 10, and the other was a two-round corner stoppage that was the result

of Zepeda dislocating his shoulder. He'd also won 32 fights, 25 of them by knockout.

The man Zepeda faced on that Saturday night in Las Vegas was Ivan Baranchyk, a Belarusian marauder whose only defeat was against current 140-pound champion Josh Taylor in May 2019. It was a loss with implications, for here again was Baranchyk, the straight-ahead pressure specialist, against a boxer-puncher who could counter and initiate attacks from various angles – the kind of ruler vs. protractor matchup in which Baranchyk had proven vulnerable.

Baranchyk doesn't seem like somebody who spends much time worrying about comparisons, though. Less than 10 seconds into Round 1, he launched a left-handed skyhook that caught Zepeda on the cheek and sent him backward into the ropes. We'd see the same punch many times in the coming rounds, but this was only a taste. There was no follow-up. Instead, there was the coiling tension of this volatile mix of styles, with Zepeda inching in reverse, watching intently for opportunities, and Baranchyk shadowing him like a starving vulture, head lowered between his gloves.

The first knockdown came at 1:15 of the first round when Zepeda threw a straight left and Baranchyk countered with a well-timed, sweeping right. The second came when the muscular Belarusian smacked his opponent in the chest with a right hook and followed with a left that didn't land too cleanly, but it was enough to do the job. Such is the power of even Baranchyk's glancing blows.

At this point, it was looking like Baranchyk might have his way, and he started the second round the same as the first, with a giant, looping left. But Zepeda had picked up on a flaw and took a judo-like approach to exploit it: Baranchyk throws punches that are so completely committed that if they don't actually hit something, his momentum carries him forward like a train that has jumped the tracks on a curve. Zepeda simply leaned back, let the punch whiff by his face and then hit the unbalanced Baranchyk as he spun past. The result wasn't ruled a knockdown, but it was another sign of things to come.

At 2:15 of the round, Baranchyk again overextended himself and lost his balance, and this time Zepeda landed a short, chopping right that put him down on all fours. Baranchyk quickly got up, but there was something a bit exaggerated in his attempt to appear unconcerned. He'd been hurt. Zepeda noticed, and he rushed in when the fight resumed. Suddenly Baranchyk's head was bouncing in every direction as his foe cut loose, and then he was falling into what looked like a possible pre-knockout retreat. But when they got to the ropes, Zepeda unwisely paid tribute to his opponent's technique with a high, looping punch, which Baranchyk avoided and then put Zepeda on his ass with a short right.

And so it went, one violent reversal after another, but Zepeda was learning how to read the signals in Baranchyk's game, both for timing counters while falling back and for getting inside to score with short left hooks at all levels. He landed one to the body after ducking another sweeping right hand, decking Baranchyk in the third round for knockdown number five.

Perhaps triggered by the canvas' caress, Baranchyk pressed harder in the fourth. At one point, he absolutely nailed Zepeda with an uppercut that put the Californian's chin over his own shoulder, and it seemed like if any punch thus far could've ended the fight, it would've been that one. But Zepeda took it, and very soon after that, Baranchyk whiffed another wide right and paid for it again as Zepeda dribbled his head between a pair of hooks and then caught him flush with another one, fully loaded. Hello canvas, my old friend.

This time, Baranchyk stayed on his back for a very brief moment, probably as his body said "enough" before his heart replied, "Never." He started the fifth round in rampage mode again, but the tread had clearly slipped off the tank's wheels a bit. His punches – each one still a full-bodied investment – had the lurching quality of somebody on the verge of collapse. Zepeda, in turn, was putting something extra on his counterpunches and landing some thudding one-two leads.

But this was, after all, the Fight of the Year, and it wasn't over yet.

With only 45 seconds left in the round, Baranchyk decided to use something neither fighter had shown much interest in: the jab. He stepped forward with a quick double poke while preparing a right cross that would land hard and send Zepeda crashing into the corner pad. That backstop being the only thing that kept Zepeda upright, referee Kenny Bayless delivered the seventh count of the fight.

When the action resumed, it was one of the calmest moments of the contest. The exhausted combatants didn't move much, Baranchyk just taking baby steps forward, Zepeda waiting for the next move. When Baranchyk finally lunged with a jab, Zepeda countered over the punch and then followed with a left that had enough leverage to cause a quarter pirouette on his front foot. The knockout was so sudden and so complete that Baranchyk's feet remained planted and his head would've fallen as straight as a dropped bowling ball had it not been for his body, which crumpled and, his right foot pinned underneath, folded back in a way that would make any knee surgeon wince. It would be a full four minutes before he was able to sit up.

In his post-fight interview, Zepeda summed it up as "two guys in there giving their all, and at the end of the day I think it's whoever wants it more." It's difficult to grasp how two people could want something so much as to push each other so far. He was also asked what he told Baranchyk after the fight, and he said: "Thank you." It's a sentiment we'd all co-sign. A classic deserves gratitude.★

BY MITCH ABRAMSON

GERVONTA DAVIS KO 6 LEO SANTA CRUZ

One of the first punches Gervonta Davis fired off in the opening seconds of his junior lightweight showdown against Leo Santa Cruz on October 31 was a counter left uppercut.

Davis stepped back and launched the punch as Santa Cruz was hurtling toward him with two jabs.

The way Davis, a southpaw, leaned back on his left foot and rotated his body into the punch,

Gervonta Davis' left uppercut produced a spectacular KO.

twisting to get maximum leverage, fully committing himself like a baseball player swinging away on a fastball, was beautiful in its simplicity and ferocity, and it's the type of creative and explosive punch that Davis is known for.

His hands held high, Santa Cruz blocked the attack, but he seemed a little startled by the nimbleness of the move, and Davis would repeat the punch over and over in the bout until he got it right.

Five rounds later, Davis achieved perfection, ducking under a right hand and knifing another left uppercut that rendered Santa Cruz unconscious.

In what shouldn't come as a surprise, Davis' exquisite finish of Santa Cruz at the Alamodome in San Antonio, Texas, is the Ring Magazine Knockout of the Year.

There were other memorable knockouts of 2020, but none carried the same element of surprise, athleticism, power and showmanship that Davis' display conveyed.

Others did come close in making a good impression, though.

The uppercut was the punch of choice when Alexander Povetkin surprised Dillian Whyte with a brutal, short left that dropped Whyte so quickly and decisively in the fifth that the referee immediately waived the fight off.

While that knockout was vicious in its economy of motion and in the stunning way it changed the fight's trajectory, Davis' punch was snappier and more dynamic, coming from a smaller and more athletic fighter, and the stakes were higher. Davis (24-0, 23 knockouts) regained the WBA 130-pound title with the knockout.

Eleider Alvarez's seventh-round KO of Michael Seals with a booming right cross on January 18 and Jose Zepeda's highlight-reel fifth-round wipeout of Ivan Baranchyk courtesy of a sweeping left on October 3 were similarly brutal, to name just a couple of knockouts that come immediately to mind. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic shortening the boxing season in 2020, there were lots of dramatic endings to get excited about.

But Davis' resounding blow at 2:40 of the sixth was the most noteworthy, since it came against a top opponent in Santa Cruz and on the brightest of stages, Showtime PPV, with Davis trying to fight off the perception that he was still untested and, for all his success, hadn't fulfilled his vast promise. In dispatching Santa Cruz so emphatically, Davis, with that single punch, justified all of the hype surrounding him.

"I was taking what he was bringing," Davis said in his post-fight interview. "I knew he was the taller fighter and he was moving forward, so once he was moving forward, I tried to throw the uppercut and make him run into the shot. I just adapted to [what he was doing]. He was just right there for it. He's a guy that punches but doesn't try to get out of the way after he punches. I baited him right in."

Until the finishing punch landed, the fight had been close. But for all the good work that Santa Cruz had done to that point, Davis seemed to have calibrated his opponent's attack and looked unconcerned by the fifth round, confident he would be able to control the rest of the fight, however long it lasted.

From that round on, Davis basically had Santa Cruz following him around the ring as he probed for the right opening to attack.

In the opening minute of the sixth, Davis landed a hard right to Santa Cruz's body that had Santa Cruz wincing and moving away. Several more body shots later, Santa Cruz looked a little weary, as if the strength had been drained from his legs. To his credit, he fought back, but Davis was undeterred.

A left hand by Davis went a little low later in the round, causing referee Rafael Ramos to halt the action to warn Davis and give Santa Cruz time to recover. When the action resumed, Davis pounced and continued to stalk Santa Cruz and load up with hard shots.

With nearly a minute left in the round, Davis put together a right-left-right combination that had Santa Cruz covering up along the ropes. Somehow, Santa Cruz soaked up the punishment and charged forward with combinations of his own, the socially distanced crowd (9,000 assembled inside an arena that can hold 70,000) responding with supportive cheers. But that was basically Santa Cruz's last stand. A look of bemusement and fatigue on his face, Santa Cruz seemed to be wilting before our eyes. He backed up toward the ropes, where the final act played out.

His back to his own corner, Santa Cruz unfurled three straight right hands. The first found its mark, the second missed. Davis was ready for what came next. When Santa Cruz rifled a third straight right, Davis ducked under and exploded with the same counter left uppercut he had been keeping warm since the opening seconds of the first round.

To say that Davis achieved full leverage on the shot is to understate its impact. Davis dipped down, leaning far to his left and then came up in one fluid, violent motion, the punch detonating on Santa Cruz's jaw. The effect was immediate. Santa Cruz collapsed in his corner and lay motionless on the canvas. As Ramos waived the fight off, Santa Cruz's father could be seen touching his son's shoulder from outside the ring, a tender moment following a destructive one.

More than a minute after the knockout, Davis walked over to check on Santa Cruz, but Santa Cruz was still out on the canvas. He finally got up to everyone's relief, including Davis', and could be seen smiling as he sat on his stool.

"That uppercut's a shot we've been working on for a while," said Calvin Ford, Davis' trainer. "If you look at the playback, you'll hear me say, 'Shoot the uppercut to the ceiling,' and he threw it just right." ★

BY DOUG FISCHER

ROMAN GONZALEZ

Roman Gonzalez entered the ring against Kal Yafai as the challenger, but "Chocolatito" was already a legend.

Two years removed from a knockout loss to Srisaket Sor Rungvisai that was so brutal it made him briefly consider retirement, Roman Gonzalez announced ambitious goals for 2020.

The former pound-for-pound king wanted to face the titleholders of the 115-pound division, starting with unbeaten WBA beltholder Kal Yafai and hopefully ending with the long-awaited rematch with Ring/WBC champ Juan Francisco Estrada.

Gonzalez, one week into camp with new trainer Marcos Caballero

in Coachella, California, made the comments to Anson Wainwright for an article that ran on RingTV.com in September 2019. Despite claims that surgery and a year off had enabled him to fully recover from a meniscus injury that prevented him from headlining HBO's "farewell" show in December 2018, even his fans doubted him in the comments area under the story.

"Chocolatito had a fantastic career, but he's done," said one of the posts.

"His time has passed," read another.

Their lack of faith for the man of faith can be forgiven after the trials and tribulations Gonzalez had been through the previous 36 months.

Gonzalez surpassed his late mentor, Alexis Arguello, when he outpointed unbeaten WBC 115-pound beltholder Carlos Cuadras in September 2016 to become Nicaragua's first four-division world titleholder, but the grueling 12-round battle took a toll on his body. And the death of Gonzalez's beloved trainer, Arnulfo Obando, due to a stroke just two months after the Cuadras victory, seemed to sap his spirit.

Yet he battled Srisaket Sor Rungvisai for 12 fierce rounds with a heavy heart in March 2017. Sor Rungvisai won a majority decision that could have gone to Gonzalez, but it was another punishing fight. If it wasn't obvious that the former beltholder at 105, 108 and 112 pounds had hit his physical ceiling at junior bantamweight following the Cuadras fight, it was now.

Gonzalez had the look of a broken man as he entered the ring for the rematch with Sor Rungvisai in September 2017, and he was shattered by the crushing fourth-round KO.

Nobody would have faulted him had he hung up his gloves in 2017. Gonzalez's most ardent supporters (this one included) believed retirement was the wise choice, even though they lamented the way his career ended and had to endure the torment of social media cretins citing Gonzalez as an example of HBO "overhyping foreign fighters" (as if the U.S. cable giant had anything to do with Gonzalez battering his way to a 42-0 record while collecting world titles in three weight classes prior to his debut on the network).

Those who knew about Gonzalez before he fought on HBO loyally defended his legacy but also worried about his health when he decided to continue fighting.

It wasn't clear if his mojo was back when he scored a fifth-round TKO of Moises Fuentes in September 2018, nor was it after a second-round stoppage of Diomel Diocos in December 2019 following his injury-free camp in the Southern California desert. Fuentes, a three-time title challenger coming off a first-round KO loss to then-flyweight beltholder Daigo Higa, had been stopped in all three of his title bouts. Diocos is a journeyman.

What would happen when Gonzalez faced a world-class fighter? He was 32 going into 2020, which isn't "old" by today's standards, but it's not young for sub-bantamweights. Most strawweights are shot by their late 20s, and Gonzalez has the pressure-fighting, volume-punching style for early burnout.

Yafai, who had made five defenses of his WBA title, would determine if Gonzalez truly had anything left when the two 115-pound standouts met on February 29.

The Birmingham, England, native wasn't overly impressive since winning the title against Luis Concepcion in 2016, but he was a big junior bantamweight with fast hands and deft lateral movement – a bad combination for an aging, undersized and possibly shopworn veteran.

However, Yafai didn't employ his stick-and-move game. From the opening bell, he took the fight directly to Gonzalez in a bold attempt to test the former champ's legs and durability. If he was indeed finished, Yafai's attack would have pushed him off the proverbial cliff.

However, Gonzalez calmly fought back and Yafai found himself in the wheelhouse of a masterful inside fighter and combination puncher.

Those who watched the live stream on DAZN, some of whom missed Gonzalez's HBO reign, were awed by his poise under fire, expert punch selection and footwork. Not unlike the middleweight version of Roberto Duran that took a prime Marvin Hagler 15 rounds and miraculously outpointed Iran Barkley for the WBC title during the 1980s, Gonzalez was no longer the dynamo that dominated lighter weight classes with his physical prowess; now he got the job done with experience, timing and technique. But unlike the aging version of his fellow Central American legend, Gonzalez amazingly retained the workrate of his prime years, and his non-stop assault bewildered and broke down a talented titleholder to a dramatic ninth-round stoppage.

The title-winning victory set #Boxing Twitter on fire. The same social media platforms where halfwits derided Gonzalez as a media creation were now alive with hipster fan adulation of a future Hall of Famer.

But was the Yafai victory a case of a special fighter digging deep for one last great effort? No, "Chocolatito" was able to get into world-class condition once more to defend the WBA belt against tough former title challenger Israel Gonzalez via one-sided unanimous decision in October.

The 50th victory of Gonzalez's pro career set up the anticipated return bout vs. Estrada, who beat Cuadras in the thrilling co-featured bout of their shared card in Mexico City. Gonzalez-Estrada II was scheduled for March 13 as this magazine went to print. The site for the showdown had yet to be announced, but hardcore fans from around the world will flock to the location if COVID-19 restrictions have abated enough to allow a sizable live audience.

Nobody had a better comeback in 2020.★

TRAINER OF THE YEAR

BY THOMAS GERBASI

TEOFIMO LOPEZ SR.

Before the judges' verdict was even read, Teofimo Lopez Sr. knew the score.

"I screamed at everybody and I told them I don't want to hear nothing about Lomachenko or 'Papachenko' ever again," said Lopez of his son Teofimo Jr.'s October 17 bout with Vasiliy Lomachenko. "I told them I'm the best trainer in the world. I told everybody from ESPN and Top Rank before they announced the winner."

In 2020, Lopez Sr., who made it a habit of wearing a shirt with the name "Nostradamus" on it in pre-fight interviews, was right. He was the best trainer in the world, and all it took was the 12-round master class Lopez Jr. delivered against the master boxer from Ukraine.

Just as he predicted it.

"I know my son more than anybody in the world," said the 52-year-old Honduras native. "I've been training him for 18 years, so I know him. I know what he can do, I know what he cannot do. All I gotta see is the other fighter and I know we can beat them."

But there was something special about Lomachenko, and Lopez Sr. made it his mission to track down the Ring/WBA/WBO lightweight champion, calling him out from the time of their infamous 2018 encounter in a New York hotel lobby.

"First of all, I knew he was scared," said Lopez Sr. "We were getting inside his head, and I always knew that my son was way better than him. I just knew it. I knew my son was faster, slicker, smarter. Lomachenko had everybody terrorized because of the 'Matrix' stuff, him going to his right and doing all the stuff that he does. And he could do that to regular guys, but not my son. And we trained for that fight. I watched video, we did a perfect plan, and it came out beautiful."

It was indeed a beautiful performance by the 23-year-old, who silenced doubters who questioned whether he was ready for Lomachenko in just his 16th pro fight. He was, and he proved it with a mature effort that showed him to be more than a knockout artist. None of this came as news to his father, who has been in the corner since his son was 6 years old. And while he is happy with what happened in Las Vegas in October, he did see room for improvement.

"The only reason why we didn't get the knockout is because he (Lomachenko) didn't commit," he said. "He knew he was gonna get knocked out, and when he knew that he was losing, he got frustrated. And I told my son, 'You need to stop carrying this guy. Take him out of there, because he's gonna cut you.' I told him that in the eighth round, and he ended up getting cut. When my son is in there, he's like a car on gas and he's checking the fuel all the time. In the 12th round, I told him you gotta let go of the gas. There's no reason for you to hold it anymore. You gotta let it go in this round, because they could rob us. And that's why he came out strong."

That strong 12th round capped off the win, and the long-discussed "Takeover" was complete. It was the culmination of what appeared to be a tumultuous 12 months between father and son, where the world got a glimpse into a relationship that wasn't always sunny. But the father says that what people see or hear isn't always the reality of the situation.

"Me and him get along perfectly," said Lopez Sr. "And we love each other. I have never pushed him in the sense that I scream at him or anything like that. We never argue, and I'm not hard on him in that way. Our training camps are very simple; I have to get him ready physically and I gotta get him ready mentally and boxing-wise."

Lopez went from tearing through Richard Commey in four minutes and 13 seconds in December 2019 to dominating Lomachenko, showing that he was more than ready for the big stage. But will Team Lopez find trouble getting emotionally invested again after chasing a single goal for so long?

"Of course not, because there's more things that we need to do," said Lopez Sr., a man never at a loss for words. "We need to unify all the belts at 140. We're gonna be around for a long time if God lets us. All I ask God for is for health. If we're healthy, my son is gonna be the best fighter in the history of boxing. That's what I believe, and we're proving it. We're doing things that nobody has done in 16 fights at 23 years old. And the haters inspire me the most, because that makes me want to prove them wrong. I want people to think that we're gonna lose. That's where the money's at."★

Lopez Jr. executed, but Lopez Sr. had the game plan set way in advance.

BY ANSON WAINWRIGHT

JARON ENNIS

When you watch Jaron Ennis fight, it's hard not to get excited. You get a sense you're witnessing something very, very special develop in front of you.

The highly regarded boxer-puncher is blessed with an intoxicating mix of otherworldly speed, sublime skills, next-level athleticism and a killer instinct that has taken care of all but two of his 26 opponents inside the distance, none going past the sixth round.

The 23-year-old won both of his 2020 outings in an exceptional manner, becoming the first to stop the usually durable Bakhtiyar Eyubov (TKO 4) and Juan Carlos Abreu (TKO 6). While neither is a world-beater, the way the switch-hitter went about his business was impressive.

As far back as Ennis can remember, he's been involved in boxing some way or another. He was born in a fight town, Philadelphia. His two older brothers, Derek and Farah, and father, Bozy, also boxed.

"I was at the gym since I was a baby," Ennis told The Ring. "I was always around. It came natural for me; it's something I love to do. I always say, 'When I get in the ring, it's like I'm at peace.'"

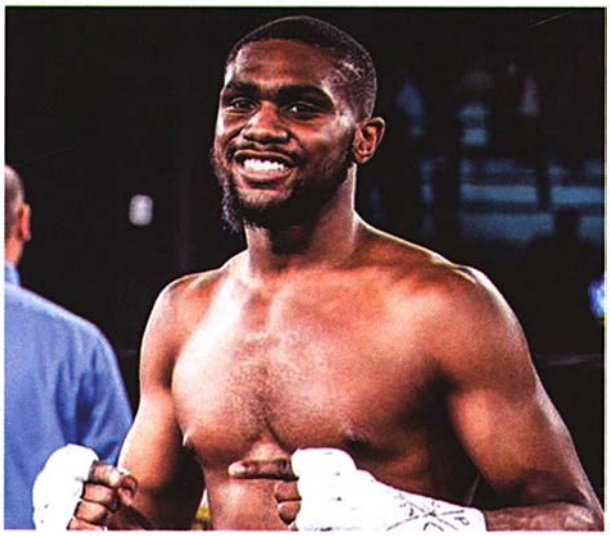
His father, who had learned the pitfalls of the sport through his two elder sons, decided to let "Boots" learn at the gym instead of working his way up on the amateur scene. The youngster gained experience sparring the likes of Julian Williams and Ray Robinson.

In 2014, in his first attempt at a national amateur title, Ennis reached the 141-pound final of the Golden Gloves tournament, where he lost to Gary Antuanne Russell (the younger brother of WBC featherweight titleholder Gary Russell Jr.). The following year, he returned and collected gold.

Ennis went on to win four national titles and enjoyed a stellar 2015, fueling aspirations of joining Team USA at the 2016 Olympics in Rio. He bested old rival Russell on the opening day of the Olympic Trials, but Russell rebounded to beat Ennis in a rematch and then a winner-take-all box-off to earn the qualifying tournament title.

The Philadelphia native decided to get a jump on the class of 2016, exiting the amateur scene with a record of 58-3, signing with former manager-turned-promoter Cameron Dunkin of Now Boxing Promotions.

"Every now and again, a guy comes along and you want him," said Dunkin, who is renowned for his work with Kelly Pavlik, Tim Bradley, Terence Crawford and Nonito Donaire, among others. "I had seen 'Boots' in the amateurs. He was sensational – great hand speed; he's lightning fast. He can punch. He had all the tools to be a top, top guy in the coming years, and I was really happy that they signed with me."



A champion in waiting? Check out Jaron "Boots" Ennis' skills and firepower and decide for yourself.

Ennis turned professional as an 18-year-old in April of that year. He kept an extremely busy pace, fighting eight times. He didn't let up in 2017, his first full year as a pro, fighting nine times.

Ennis won five times in 2018, which included making his *ShoBox* debut when he stopped previously unbeaten Armando Alvarez in three rounds. He closed the year out with another eye-opening performance on *ShoBox*, stopping crosstown rival Raymond Serrano in two rounds.

Former Ring Editor-In-Chief Steve Farhood, who now serves as an on-air analyst for *ShoBox*, has observed several of Ennis' fights live and is extremely impressed.

"It is indeed rare when you see a young fighter whom you believe would be competitive with contenders before he faces even one opponent you've heard of," said Farhood. "But for me, that was exactly the situation with Ennis.

"His talents are obvious, but equally important is his poise and comfort in the ring. He was hitting a heavy bag before he could walk, and that early exposure to boxing is quite apparent."

Promotional issues limited Ennis to just two fights in 2019. However, 2020, despite the pandemic, has been a strong one for Ennis.

"You could say that, but I feel like 2021 will be a bigger and better year," said the forward-thinking fighter. "I'll get to fight those contenders, guys with a name and champions."

Farhood feels Ennis will go from strength to strength in the coming years.

"Ennis' ceiling is unimaginably high," said the veteran scribe. "He can be the best welterweight in the world within a couple of years. At this point, there is no reason to continue matching him with inferior opposition, so I expect him to make his initial move toward the top very soon."

Ennis closed out the year against longtime contender Chris van Heerden, who replaced Thomas Dulorme after the Puerto Rican tested positive for COVID-19, but that fight unfortunately ended in a no-contest after van Heerden suffered a cut due to an accidental headbutt in the first round.

"I feel my career is going how I wanted it to go," said Ennis. "I don't think I'm that far away, but we're not rushing. We're just following the plan right now."

The "City of Brotherly Love" may well have its next champion-in-waiting.

For now, Ennis is The Ring's Prospect of the Year. ★

MOST INSPIRATIONAL

BY JAMIE REBNER

KIM CLAVEL

Without a doubt, 2020 has been an arduous year. The COVID-19 pandemic has struck humanity with resounding authority. And while it's been hard for everyone, it's been unimaginably difficult for the frontline workers who have been battling to contain the virus.

One of those frontline workers is Kim Clavel, an undefeated junior flyweight from Joliette, Quebec, and this year's Most Inspirational boxer. Clavel has demonstrated that her resiliency and fighting spirit exist beyond the ring ropes just as they do inside of them.

When the pandemic hit in March, Clavel returned full-time to her job as a nurse, which she has delicately balanced along with boxing throughout her career. At the time, she was getting ready to headline her first main event at the Montreal Casino on March 21. After getting over its cancellation, she switched her focus to helping those in need. Over three months, she worked long hours in 11 different long-term care facilities to help care for as many as 30 patients at a time.

In a video tribute dedicated to her winning the Pat Tillman Award at the 2020 ESPYs, Clavel explained what she went through when the whole world was turned upside down.

Clavel put up a fight in and out of the ring in 2020 and deserves our respect.

"When the fight was canceled because of the pandemic, I cried. It was a depression for two days. After that, I said it's enough. I am healthy; I have two arms and two legs, so what can I do to help? I went to work in the COVID zone with old people with Alzheimer's. At night, when everything is dark, they think about their life. They're scared. They miss their family. They need to talk, so I am there; I sing and talk with them and make them smile. To see these people dying alone, without their family, it's not humanity."

Clavel couldn't even visit her grandmother Irène, a major inspiration in her life, because she didn't want to expose her to the deadly coronavirus. "One night after my shift, I was crying. I missed my grandmother so much, because it's like I take care of every grandparent but I can't take care of mine," Clavel explained. "I called my boxing coach, and she told me that, 'I know it's hard, but you have to do it, and you are the best to do it.'"

Clavel made a triumphant return to the ring in July at the MGM Grand Bubble on the Oscar Valdez-Jayson Velez undercard. She handed Natalie Gonzalez (6-1, 1 KO) her first loss as a pro, beating the New York native by shutout decision over eight rounds. Clavel's success continued in her second fight of the year as she beat Barbara Martinez (3-9-1) over six rounds in a stay-busy contest in Mexico on November 28.

Despite all the despair that has defined 2020, the French-Canadian has managed to turn it into a positive year. In addition to being recognized by The Ring and The ESPYs, Clavel was one of 10 standout individuals named 2020's Next Generation Leaders by Time magazine.

"It has been a fantastic year that I'll never forget," Clavel acknowledged to the Montreal Gazette. "Even if I had to work and saw things in the elderly centers that were horrible, good things happened to me. When you do the right things in life, sometimes life gives you something in exchange."

Doing the right thing is precisely what Clavel chose to do. She could have easily spent the peak pandemic months training and improving her boxing skills, and no one would have blamed her. Instead, the altruistic Quebecer put herself in harm's way as a nurse, where the risk of catching the virus was high.

It was her compassionate nature that was the driving force behind that decision, as well as the one to choose nursing as a profession in the first place. When Kim was 9, she tagged along to assist her mother, also a nurse, by helping Alzheimer's patients with their meals. It was then that Clavel realized that her calling in life was to follow in her mother's footsteps.

Kim has earned this year's Most Inspirational award, in addition to the numerous other accolades she's received, because of the selflessness she's shown in putting the needs of others ahead of her own.

"The most rewarding part was to see people feel better," she said. "More than money, that was my pay. When they thank you for what you're doing, for smiling, talking to them, for the good care. That's the best reward. If everyone in this world would take care of the people around them, just help one person, that would make a huge difference.

"I want to be the world champion – not only in boxing but in life, too. I want to show little girls they can be someone; they can do whatever they want. When you dream, when you focus, you can do it."

To all the young girls and others out there looking for a role model to be inspired by, look no further than Kim Clavel. ★

EVENT OF THE YEAR

BY DONALD MCRAE

COVID-19

In 2020, boxing took on a look that even the most imaginative of people never dreamed of.

They always say that the heaviest and most damaging blows are those that a fighter doesn't see before they land. Even the most durable competitors in the ring can buckle and be knocked down by a punch that comes from seemingly nowhere. The struggle, then, is to try and avoid oblivion and find a way to get up again on unsteady legs and with scrambled senses.

This is the current, perilous state of boxing after being nailed by a brute of a sucker punch called COVID-19.

At the start of the year, boxing, like most of us, rolled forward with the usual complacency and ignorance. Words like "bubble,"

"COVID-19," "furlough," "lockdown," "pandemic," "self-isolation" and "social distance" were either innocent, obscure or simply unknown.

I remember being in Las Vegas in mid-February with Tyson Fury as he prepared for the first big fight of 2020 against Deontay Wilder. One crisp, sunlit morning in a taxi from the Strip to the Top Rank gym, the driver spoke about the fight and how quiet Vegas was that week. There were no conventions in town and boxing fans had yet to arrive. On February 11, the World Health Organization had introduced the name COVID-19 to the world. It supplemented the equally strange tag of "coronavirus," which for the first six weeks of the year had been heard in relation to a mysterious disease that had spread rapidly across China.

"Are people worried about this new virus?" I asked the taxi driver. On January 20, the first case of COVID-19 in the U.S. had been confirmed in the state of Washington, and 10 days later, the WHO warned of a "Public Health Emergency of International Concern."

"Hell, no," the driver said. "That stuff ain't ever reaching Vegas."

Boxing felt just as certain and just as safe. There were no masks or hand sanitizers in the gym as Fury planned Wilder's downfall. Even on the tumultuous night of February 22, as Fury followed his new strategy and knocked out a frightening puncher in Wilder, few of us had any idea that the world, and boxing, was about to change in unimaginable ways. Who would have believed it if we had been told then that Halloween night would be the next time fans could attend a major boxing promotion in the U.S.?

On October 31, a crowd of 9,000 rattled around the Alamodome in San Antonio. That huge arena holds 72,000 people and there was something eerie and poignant in seeing boxing's first small, socially distanced crowd since the pandemic began as they waited for Gervonta Davis to KO Leo Santa Cruz with an uppercut even more devastating than the punches that had stopped Wilder eight months earlier.

The surreal backdrop had become routine. We had grown used to hearing about boxers isolating in a COVID bubble and seeing them being tested for the coronavirus and wearing masks to the weigh-in and on their ring walks. The sight of masks and protective visors on their cornermen and the ring being sanitized between bouts by people wearing uniforms that looked straight out of a sci-fi movie were familiar. The abnormal had become normal.

COVID-19, sadly, is boxing's Event of the Year. The way in which this deadly virus tore a hole through the sport has been distressing. Of course, it has been far more sobering to witness the ruinous impact the coronavirus has had globally. In early December, nearly 63.5 million cases of COVID-19 had been diagnosed around the world and almost 1.5 million had died as a direct result of the disease. Businesses have been decimated and tens of millions of jobs have been lost.

Boxing, of course, is not immune, and the economic and human cost of COVID-19 has been painful. Promoters, managers, trainers, fans and the fighters have suffered worry and hardship because of the coronavirus. Boxing went into total lockdown for months around the world. It was June before the sport rose groggily to its feet and the first major lockdown promotion was held in Las Vegas on a low-key Top Rank bill headlined by Shakur Stevenson and Felix Caraballo.

Boxing has always been resilient, and so new ways were found to stage fights. Eddie Hearn's decision to put on shows in his vast backyard in the English countryside was perhaps the most amusing and innovative form of lockdown boxing. But the novelty and simple pleasure of being able to watch boxing again on television or live streams had severe limitations. Beyond hearing the instructions barked from opposing corners, and the more disturbing sound of flesh and bone being hit hard by shuddering punches, the silence surrounding these deserted and makeshift venues seemed overwhelming.

It has also been costly. Promoters lament the expense entailed in staging bio-secure shows without fans – and boxers have had to accept reduced purses for rare fights. Companies like DAZN have seen their plans crushed by COVID-19, and every promotional outfit, from the most established to the newest, has struggled to cope with the crisis. Television contracts and pay-per-view deals have helped elite boxers, but there have been heartfelt stories of financial adversity and even destitution for lower-tier fighters.

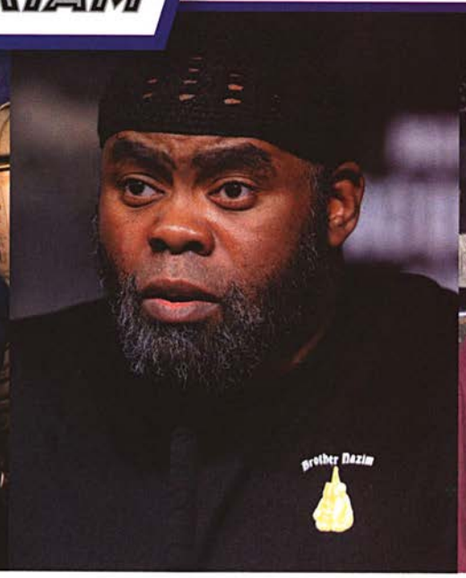
Boxing needs the lifeblood pumped through the sport by its fans. Without money being paid at the gate or on regular subscription packages and pay-per-view channels, boxing has reeled throughout this long and desolate year. The sport will struggle to survive another 12 months in a sealed COVID bubble. This is especially true at amateur and club level where the closure of gyms and the cutting of public, regional and state funding threatens boxing's foundations.

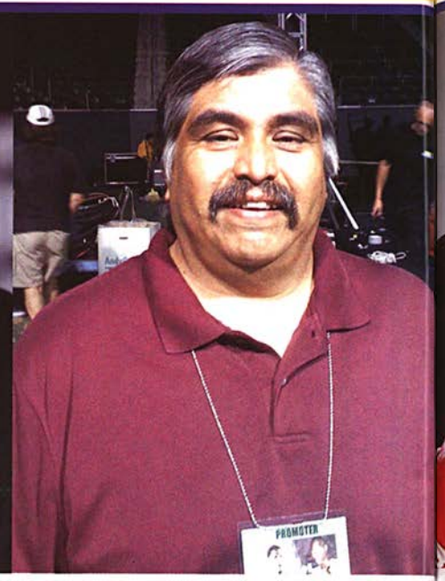
There have still been promotions in the U.S. and the U.K. most weekends since late July. But the sport has been a shadow of its usual vibrant, chaotic self. It has been knocked down by a series of invisible blows as shocking as they are painful.

But boxing has staggered to its feet and it carries fresh hope. In 2021, with new vaccines ready and available, a way may have been found to knock out this sucker called COVID-19 once and for all. Boxing, like all of us, craves and needs that thrilling outcome. ★

IN MEMORIAM

BY DOUG FISCHER





The past year was a tumultuous one, in no small part due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to plague the planet. The loss of beloved boxing figures Jimmy Glenn (who died of COVID-19-related complications at 89), Naazim Richardson and Ricardo Jimenez, as well as respected former fighters, including Curtis Cokes, Roger Mayweather and Hedgemon Lewis (who also died of COVID-19-related complications at 74), made an already tough year even harder to bear. The Ring acknowledges the members of the global boxing community who passed in 2020 (listed here in alphabetical order):

Javier Alejandro Gonzalez Barrientos – Undefeated (15-0, 11 KOs) junior welterweight prospect from Mexico.

Johnny Bumphus – Former WBA 140-pound titleholder who fought Marlon Starling, Randy Shields and Lloyd Honeyghan during his six-plus years as a pro (1980-1987).

Miguel Angel Castellini – Former WBA 154-pound titleholder from Argentina who fought 94 times during his 15-year pro career (1965-1980).

Curtis Cokes – Former welterweight champion and International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee who battled Cuban greats Jose Napoles and Luis Rodriguez during his 80-bout, 14-year pro career (1958-1972). Cokes, a central figure in the Dallas boxing scene, was also a respected world-class trainer.

Dickie Cole – Longtime boxing commissioner in the state of Texas (as the Combative Sports program manager for the Department of Licensing and Regulations from 1993-2014), former amateur boxer and pro referee.

Eddie Cotton – Longtime world-class referee. Cotton, who worked from 1992-2014, refereed the 2002 heavyweight championship showdown between Lennox Lewis and Mike Tyson.

Dickie DiVeronica – Former welterweight contender who fought Hall of Famer Emile Griffith during a 14-year pro career (1958-1972). The native of Canastota, New York, was a fixture at the annual International Boxing Hall of Fame induction weekends.

Jimmy Glenn – Beloved New York City boxing figure. Glenn was a former amateur boxer, a veteran trainer, manager and cutman, and the owner of Jimmy's Corner, a popular bar in Times Square.

Danny Gonzalez – Former junior amateur standout and featherweight prospect. Gonzalez (3-0) was briefly signed to Mayweather Promotions.

Ricardo Jimenez – Beloved longtime publicist for Top Rank, as well as numerous Latino champions, including Erik Morales and Miguel Cotto. Jimenez was a general sports reporter and editor for La Opinion newspaper and a Spanish commentator for Forum Boxing before becoming one of the best dual-language PR men in the business.

Royal Kobayashi – Former WBC 122-pound titleholder from Japan who fought Hall of Famers Alexis Arguello, Wilfredo Gomez and Eusebio Pedroza during his eight-and-a-half-year pro career (1973-1981).

Alfred Kotey – Former WBO bantamweight titleholder from Ghana who fought Juan Manuel Marquez, Acelino Freitas and Orlando Salido during a 23½-year pro career (1988-2012).

Hedgemon Lewis – Top welterweight contender who fought for the title three times (twice against Jose Napoles) and briefly held "champion" recognition from the New York State commission following a decision over Billy Backus during a 10-year pro career (1966-1976). Also served as an assistant trainer to the legendary Eddie Futch for decades.

Peter Mathebula – Former WBA flyweight titleholder from South Africa who battled South American standouts Santos Laciar and Betulio Gonzalez during a 12-year pro career (1971-1983).

Jean-Baptiste Mendy – Two-time lightweight titleholder (WBC and WBA) from France (born in Senegal) who fought Stevie Johnston and Miguel Angel Gonzalez and was the first to defeat Orzubek Nazarov during a 17-year pro career (1983-2000).

Alan Minter – Former middleweight champion from England who fought Marvin Hagler, Emile Griffith and Vito Antuofermo during a nine-year career (1972-1981).

Roger Mayweather – Two-division titleholder (WBA 130-pound and WBC 140-pound titles) who fought Hall of Famers Julio Cesar Chavez, Pernell Whitaker and Kostya Tszyu during a 72-bout, 18-year pro career (1981-1999). Mayweather was also a world-class trainer who contributed to the pro development and numerous championship reigns of his nephew Floyd Mayweather Jr.

Travell Mazion – Undefeated (17-0, 13 KOs) junior middleweight prospect from Texas who was signed to Golden Boy Promotions.

Naazim Richardson – Respected world-class amateur and pro trainer who worked with Hall of Famers Bernard Hopkins and Shane Mosley.

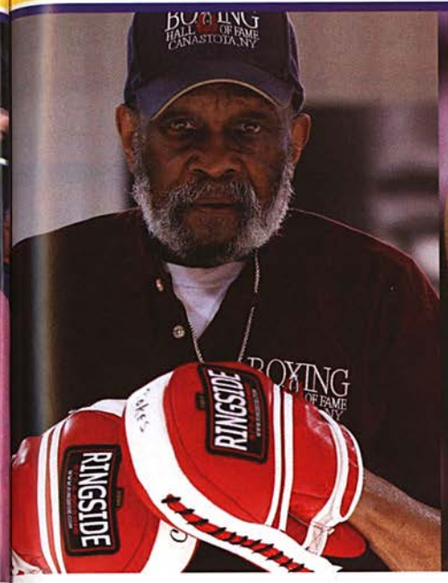
Juan Domingo Roldan – Perennial middleweight contender from Argentina who challenged Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearns and Michael Nunn in world title bouts during a 75-bout, 10-year pro career (1978-1988).

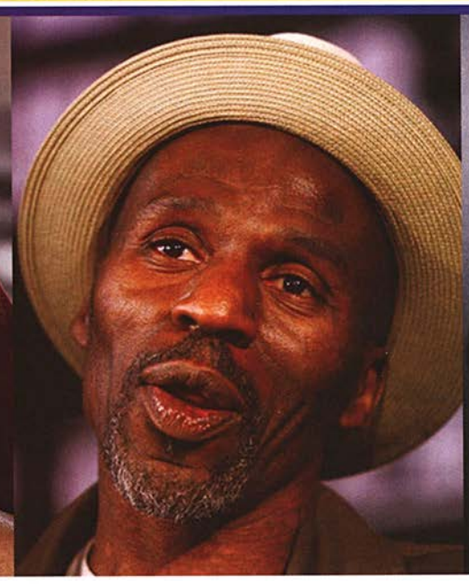
Ron Ross – Award-winning writer who authored several boxing-related books, including the novel *Tomato Can* and the biographical works *Bummy Davis vs. Murder, Inc.: The Rise and Fall of the Jewish Mafia and an Ill-Fated Prizefighter* and *Nine … Ten … and Out! The Two Worlds of Emile Griffith*.

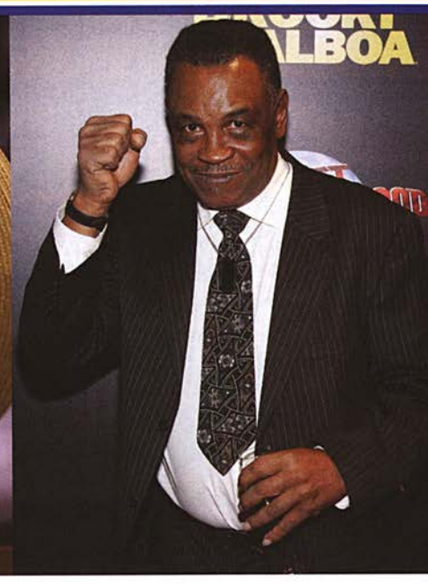
Angelo Rottoli – Former cruiserweight title challenger and European champ who fought Carlos De Leon, Bash Ali and Anaclet Wamba during an eight-and-a-half-year pro career (1981-1990).

Ali Salaam – Father and trainer of former WBC 154-pound titleholder Tony Harrison who fought briefly as a professional (1984-1989).

Jim Strickland – Veteran manager, trainer, cornerman and cutman who guided Lee Roy Murphy, William Guthrie and David Diaz to world titles and worked with Evander Holyfield, Michael Spinks, Leon Spinks, Mike McCallum, Cory Spinks and David Tua, among many others, during a career that spanned decades.







(From left to right) Jimmy Glenn, Naazim Richardson, Ricardo Jimenez, Curtis Cokes, Roger Mayweather and Hedgemon Lewis.

HUNTING A GOLDEN TICKET

THE OLYMPICS MAY HAVE BEEN POSTPONED, BUT **O'SHEA JONES** STILL PLANS ON DOMINATING IN JAPAN TO GIVE HER PRO DEBUT A BOOST

By **Thomas Gerbasi**

Already a handful of fights into a promising pro career after deciding to forego a run at the 2020 Olympics, Otha Jones III was asked why he didn't stick around for Tokyo.

"I'll let my sister have all the fame from the Olympics," he said.

Otha wasn't just being a good brother, as his sister will now be the one representing the family and the United States in the Games, which are now being held in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Staying in the amateur ranks wasn't an easy decision for 22-year-old O'Shea Jones, who might have been preparing for a pro career with a gold medal around her neck right now. But she has no regrets.

"I decided to stick around because as a female boxer, we don't get paid as much as males for doing the same thing, so I think it was just a better outcome for my career in the long run," said Jones.

In other words, while someone like her brother can turn pro, attract attention from a promoter (Otha Jones III is signed to Matchroom Boxing) and start moving toward titles and big paydays almost immediately, it's been a tougher go for the ladies, so an Olympic medal just may be the ticket to starting out ahead of the pack in the punch-for-pay ranks.

"I think [a gold medal] is a big factor on the marketing side because you have something to show," said Jones. "You don't want to go pro without having a lot of stuff under your belt."

Jones is putting plenty of stuff together as she prepares for her first trip to Japan, including titles in the 2020 Boxam International tournament; the 2019 Pan Am Games; and in the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Elite National Championships.

It was in that first National tournament that something she simply did after school became something more serious.

"My first Nationals I won as I turned Elite, I was like, 'Wow, I'm a grown woman; this is serious,'" she laughs. "This is no junior or youth, this is for real. I'm grown. I could fight a 35-year-old. I guess that's when I started taking it serious."

Four years later, it's gotten even more serious for the Toledo native, who practically grew up in the Soul City Boxing Gym founded by her father, Otha Jones Jr., and brother/trainer Roshawn.

"You know how most families, if their dad is in the army, then their daughter is supposed to be in the army," she said. "I think it was just expected [for me to box]. I never questioned it or went against the grain. And I was talented, so I pursued it."

And perhaps what makes her so good – and a favorite for gold in Tokyo –

CHRIS GRAYTHEN

O'Shea Jones celebrates after winning welterweight gold at the 2019 Pan American Games in Lima, Peru.

is that Jones didn't get any special treatment in the gym that also produced 2016 Olympian and current top prospect Charles Conwell. There are no smoothie bars or tanning beds in Soul City, just hard work and a grit you can't teach. And all the Olympic appearances, trophies and medals can't change the fighters who emerge from there. Even today, with the coronavirus still raging, the fighters in this Ohio gym are still getting their work in.

"We've been open, but we have just been open to us, because it's like our second home," said Jones. "We have beds in there; we sleep in there. It's just for the family. No outsiders or anything like that."

That's not to say it's been a smooth road in the ring for Jones, who struggled at times internationally when she first started competing on the road.

"I think everybody has those doubts in the back of their mind," she said. "Mine was when I first lost overseas. I didn't know their styles over there; they had different styles than the Americans. I blew everybody out in America, but when you go overseas, it's different. I was like, 'What is this?' So I took an 'L' over there and I thought maybe I'm not good enough. But I went back to the drawing board, studied what I was messing up, where my mind was at, how I wasn't focused and stuff like that, and I got right back on track."

In October, Jones stayed sharp with a win in the Boxam tournament in Spain, earning her second international gold medal and proving that those early hiccups were a thing of the past. Now all that's left is to wait to take her trip to "The Land of the Rising Sun," where she plans on getting some of Tokyo's iconic ramen after hopefully securing the United States' next gold medal in women's boxing after Claressa Shields did it twice in 2012 and 2016.

Then the fun really begins, and while welterweight clocks in at 152 pounds in the amateurs, Jones expects to drop down in weight once she turns pro.

"I see myself dropping down because I don't think I have my grown woman body yet," she laughs. "I can slim down. And I'm not worried about what the pros are gonna look like, because with my trainer and my team, I can make any weight I want to. So if I wanted to go down to 132, I could. Anything I want to do, I can do, so I'm not worried about nothing or looking at nobody."

Sounds like somebody who is ready for the world. She admits that might not have been the case if the Olympics took place as scheduled in 2020, but now she can't wait to show what she can do in and out of the ring.

"I thought I was ready the first time around, but I don't feel like I was when I look back at it," Jones said. "But now that it's been taken away from me and I have to start all over again, I'm definitely ready this time. I'm ready for whatever." ★

2020 WOMEN'S BOXING AWARDS

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR
KATIE TAYLOR

This was an easy call for Katie Taylor in 2019. That wasn't the case in 2020, as Terri Harper, Mikaela Mayer and Jessica McCaskill all had strong Fighter of the Year arguments. But in the end, it was Taylor getting the nod for the second year in a row thanks to a more convincing victory over fellow pound-for-pound list member Delfine Persoon in their August rematch and a near-shutout over previously unbeaten Miriam Gutierrez, both of which kept all the lightweight title belts in Bray, Ireland.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR
TERRI HARPER VS. NATASHA JONAS

In August 2018, Natasha Jonas was written off after a stoppage loss to Viviane Obenauf. Completely written off. Two years and three days later, the Olympian for Great Britain came within one point on one judge's scorecard from taking Terri Harper's WBC junior lightweight title in a bout ultimately ruled a draw. And yes, the storyline was great, but the action was even better as Harper and Jonas traded for 10 rounds, with the infighting some of the best seen in the ladies' game in some time. Harper has been going back and forth with Mikaela Mayer on social media, and unification is nice, but Jonas earned another shot at the belt in 2021.

KNOCKOUT OF THE YEAR
SENIESA ESTRADA KO 1 MIRANDA ADKINS

This may be a controversial call, considering that Miranda Adkins had no business being in the ring with Seniesa Estrada in their July bout, but in a situation like that, the unbeaten "Superbad" did what she should have done, and that was a blistering seven-second knockout ended with a four-punch combo that made highlight reels across the sporting world. But hey, if you want to be a purist, Etsuko Tada's knockout of Ayaka Miyao in their December rematch wasn't bad, either.

UPSET OF THE YEAR
JESSICA MCCASKILL W 10 CECILIA BRAEKHUS

Yulihan Luna Avila's 10-round win over Mariana Juarez may have been more shocking to the hardcores, but to practically everyone else, seeing Cecilia Braekhus' long reign atop the welterweight division come to an end in August was the biggest upset of 2020. Pulling off the majority decision win to take all of the undisputed champ's belts was Chicago's Jessica McCaskill, who gave up size to Braekhus but made up for it with grit and determination as she pounded out the victory to become not just a two-division world champ, but a major player in some of the biggest fights of 2021, starting with her rematch against the "First Lady."

ROUND OF THE YEAR
TERRI HARPER-NATASHA JONAS, ROUND 5

There's been more talk than ever about having an across-the-board move to three-minute rounds for the ladies, and this round shows precisely why it's needed. Simply put, the two minutes put together by Harper and Jonas felt like 30 seconds; that's how much thrilling infighting there was, and it was brilliant, high-level stuff from both, with Jonas digging to the body while Harper responded with momentum-stealing uppercuts, setting the stage for five more rounds of back-and-forth action.

TRAINER OF THE YEAR
STEFY BULL

Just 12 fights into her pro career, and England's Terri Harper has gone from obscurity to the top of the 130-pound weight class, and she's got the title of "world champion" to prove it. Manager/trainer Stefy Bull has a lot to do with that rapid rise of the 24-year-old. A former boxer himself who retired in 2010 with a 29-7-1 record, Bull (birth name Andrew Bullcroft) remained in the game and found a diamond in Harper, whom he didn't baby on her way up the ranks. By February of this year, she had a world title, and she went on to successfully defend it with a draw against Natasha Jonas and a ninth-round stoppage of Katharina Thanderz in which she had to adjust after breaking her hand in the fourth round.

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR
KIM CLAVEL

Featured in The Ring after she won the Pat Tillman ESPY Award for Service after putting her boxing career on hold to return to nursing in her native Montreal, junior flyweight up-and-comer Kim Clavel made two ring appearances in 2020, defeating Natalie Gonzalez and Barbara Munoz to improve to 13-0 and keep her place intact as Canada's best hope for world title honors in 2021.

EVENT OF THE YEAR
CLARESSA SHIELDS ANNOUNCES MOVE TO MMA

Despite 2020 being the year most wanted to forget, women's boxing had a stellar season once the sport came off pause, with Matchroom Boxing, Top Rank and Golden Boy Promotions giving the ladies plenty of TV time. But the biggest headline came from outside the ropes when Claressa Shields announced that she had signed with the PFL mixed martial arts promotion. Shields insists that she will juggle both careers, but will this be something she regrets once she takes her first kick to the leg or gets on the wrong end of a submission hold?

MOST INSPIRATIONAL
KIM CLAVEL

Already a top prospect (see above), Canada's Kim Clavel showed the kind of character she possesses outside the ring in 2020, as she responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by going right to the front lines to pick up her previous career as a nurse, aiding senior citizens in their time of need on the overnight shift. It was a selfless act, and one that inspired people around the globe.

The great ex-champions shared belts as well as millions of dollars following their eight-round exhibition.

THE SIDESHOW SUCCESS

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, **MIKE TYSON VS. ROY JONES JR.** MAY HAVE BEEN THE FIRST OF MANY 'EXHIBITIONS' TO COME

By **Brin-Jonathan Butler**

Half a century ago, "The Super Fight," a film depicting the results of a computer-generated, fictional boxing match between Muhammad Ali and Rocky Marciano, was released in 1,500 movie theaters around the world for one night only. By all witness accounts, it was a lucrative night for the owners of those theaters as audiences packed the seats.

The film, detailed in a story by Don Stradley in the January 2021 issue of The Ring, drew upon 70 one-minute rounds of soft sparring between a long-retired, 45-year-old Marciano and a cash-strapped Ali to give the *impression* the boxers were something like marionettes being manipulated by the NCR 315, which supposedly had constructed a plausible script within its remarkable 20kb worth of memory. Curiously, there were claims that the outcome of the fight differed according to the continent on which you watched it. American and Canadian audiences witnessed Marciano knocking out Ali in the 13th round, while European audiences allegedly watched as Ali knocked out Marciano in the 13th. Immediately after the film was shown, Ali launched a lawsuit against producer Murray Woroner for defamation, while Marciano would tragically die in a plane crash only three weeks later.

THE SIDESHOW SUCCESS

Fifty years after "The Super Fight" sideshow was released to audiences around the world, a similarly surreal, bizarre spectacle unfolded on November 28 at Staples Center in Los Angeles. A Mike Tyson and Roy Jones Jr. fight, 17 years after one was first proposed, headlined a $50 pay-per-view card after YouTube star Jake Paul (20.3 million subscribers; 14 million followers on Instagram) savagely dispensed with the NBA's first three-time slam dunk champion, Nate Robinson. An estimated audience of 1.2 million watched the event, making it the most successful pay-per-view of 2020 for the sport of boxing and second overall in combat sports after UFC 251. Perhaps even more miraculous than streaming service Triller's gamble paying off on the Tyson and Jones exhibition fight was the customer satisfaction with the product on display. Generally the consensus by most fans and boxing writers was that people got their money's worth watching two legendary boxers, with a combined age of 105, engage in a cautious sparring session for a grand total of 16 minutes' worth of scheduled action.

Of course Tyson had not fought professionally since losing to journeyman Kevin McBride in 2005. After losing that fight, Tyson declared, "I can't do this stuff anymore. I don't want to embarrass the sport. It's a great sport and I don't want to disrespect it." Tyson went on to confess, "My career was over in 1990."

Jones' career had never recovered since he suffered a chilling knockout loss to Antonio Tarver in 2004, the first of five brutal stoppages over the 14 years that followed. Only a year prior, in 2003, immediately after Jones defeated John Ruiz for the WBA heavyweight title, a dream fight between Tyson and Jones was first proposed, with Jones opening as a 2-to-1 favorite. Jones' fall was beyond precipitous; it seemed almost biblical in scale. For a fighter whose prime overlapped Floyd Mayweather Jr.'s for some years, you would be hard-pressed to locate a solitary voice advocating that Mayweather was the superior pound-for-pound fighter during that period of time. Yet while Mayweather would become the most financially successful boxer of all time and retire from the sport undefeated, Jones' efforts dangled the legacy of a cautionary tale that at various times almost overshadowed the majesty of his achievements as one of the most sublime boxers ever to enter a ring.

Before a punch was thrown by Tyson or Jones on November 28, inauspiciously for many, California State Athletic Commission executive director Andy Foster had tempered expectations for the event by warning the bout would be stopped with so much as a "bad cut" or "some kind of real fight" broke out. "People shouldn't be getting knocked out," Foster added. Referee Ray Corona, Foster assured, understood what an exhibition was. "It's not a fight-fight."

Quickly Triller's Ryan Kavanaugh assured the potential audience for the event would indeed be watching a "fight-fight." Mike Tyson and Roy Jones followed suit while making the media rounds, with Jones assuring me by phone, "This is the most dangerous fight of my career."

But ultimately none of that hype seemed to make any difference with fans invested in the nostalgia aspect of the fight. Both fighters honored their pre-fight safety pledge to Andy Foster and offered an exhibition match that commentator Snoop Dogg observed resembled two of his uncles fighting at a barbecue. Which, curiously, proved more than enough to please most fans and critics of the event. Despite the obvious parallels to a circus sideshow, given the age of the participants, and the worry expressed by many critics leading up to the exhibition, nobody got seriously hurt. Surprisingly, what unfolded circulated no small measure of positive feelings amongst fans regardless of a single meaningful blow landing.

Leading up to the fight, compared with premium, pay-walled traditional boxing content, the event generated far more interest from not just so-called "casual boxing fans," but even *non*-boxing fans, given the intense coverage by the mainstream media which, for many years, has hardly allocated much ink for the sweet science beyond mega-events. If boxing insiders failed to take this event seriously, the cultural resonance and excitement it generated beyond the boxing world offers boxing some sobering and potentially ominous issues to grapple with if it wants to regain its footing in the American cultural landscape. Why has boxing struggled to the degree it has to create (or *attract*) American talent that can not just tempt the attention of casual fans of the sports but, when it has their attention, leave them wanting more? Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Maywather's "Fight of the Century" may have been the greatest financial success in boxing history for anyone who stood to profit, but that fact stands in direct opposition to it's legacy for anyone who actually paid to watch it.

At the height of his marketability, Mike Tyson once disturbingly suggested he could sell out Madison Square Garden masturbating. Tyson, at 54, after losing 100 pounds and boasting of getting high just before stepping into the ring against Jones for an exhibition bout, arguably remains one of the sports most bankable stars and recognizable ambassadors stepping into the ring against *anybody*.

The Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey recognized the enormous demand for circus sideshows as far back as the 19th Century and furnished the public with bearded ladies, fire-eaters, sword-swallowers and an assortment of human oddities to satisfy the hunger of the American audience. Adding Mike Tyson's global celebrity and decades-long genius at self-marketing to that milieu, Triller seems to have found a financial bonanza on their hands moving forward. The key difference between Ali and Marciano's sideshow event and November 28's pay-per-view exhibition between Tyson and Jones was of course the potential for actual violence inflicted between two men in their 50s for our entertainment. As with children's advanced susceptibility to trauma, *older* brains are acutely more vulnerable to damage. Add to the mix that Roy Jones' brain has suffered some catastrophic damage from punchers far less menacing than even a faded Mike Tyson.

However, since the watered-down version of *Celebrity Deathmatch* didn't go terribly wrong and the event proved a success for both Triller and the fans who paid for it, just what do we have to look forward to next? In the short term, probably a giddy Evander Holyfield or Shannon Briggs dying to become Tyson's next opponent. And if those make even more money, buckle up; it's an even more slippery slope from there into vastly more surreal and twisted depths thereafter. Until something goes very wrong, the sideshow tent might well become boxing's biggest attraction.

The glory days were clearly just a memory, but fans responded respectfully.

JOE SCARNICI

JOSHUA-PULEV
AND THE HEAVYWEIGHT MIX

ANTHONY JOSHUA'S LATEST WIN REKINDLED SOME ENTHUSIASM AROUND THE U.K. STAR; HOPEFULLY IT ALSO GOT US CLOSER TO WHAT WE REALLY WANT TO SEE

By **Thomas Hauser**

On December 12, Anthony Joshua of England outclassed Kubrat Pulev of Bulgaria en route to a ninth-round stoppage to retain his World Boxing Association, International Boxing Federation and Word Boxing Organization heavyweight belts. It was Joshua's first fight in the United Kingdom since September 2018 and the first major sanctioning body heavyweight title fight since the coronavirus lockdown began.

Joshua was born in Watford (15 miles northwest of London) in 1989 to Nigerian parents who divorced when he was 12. After attending boarding school briefly in Nigeria, he returned to England and found trouble in the streets, culminating in an arrest for the possession of eight ounces of cannabis with "intent to supply" – a charge that carried with it a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison.

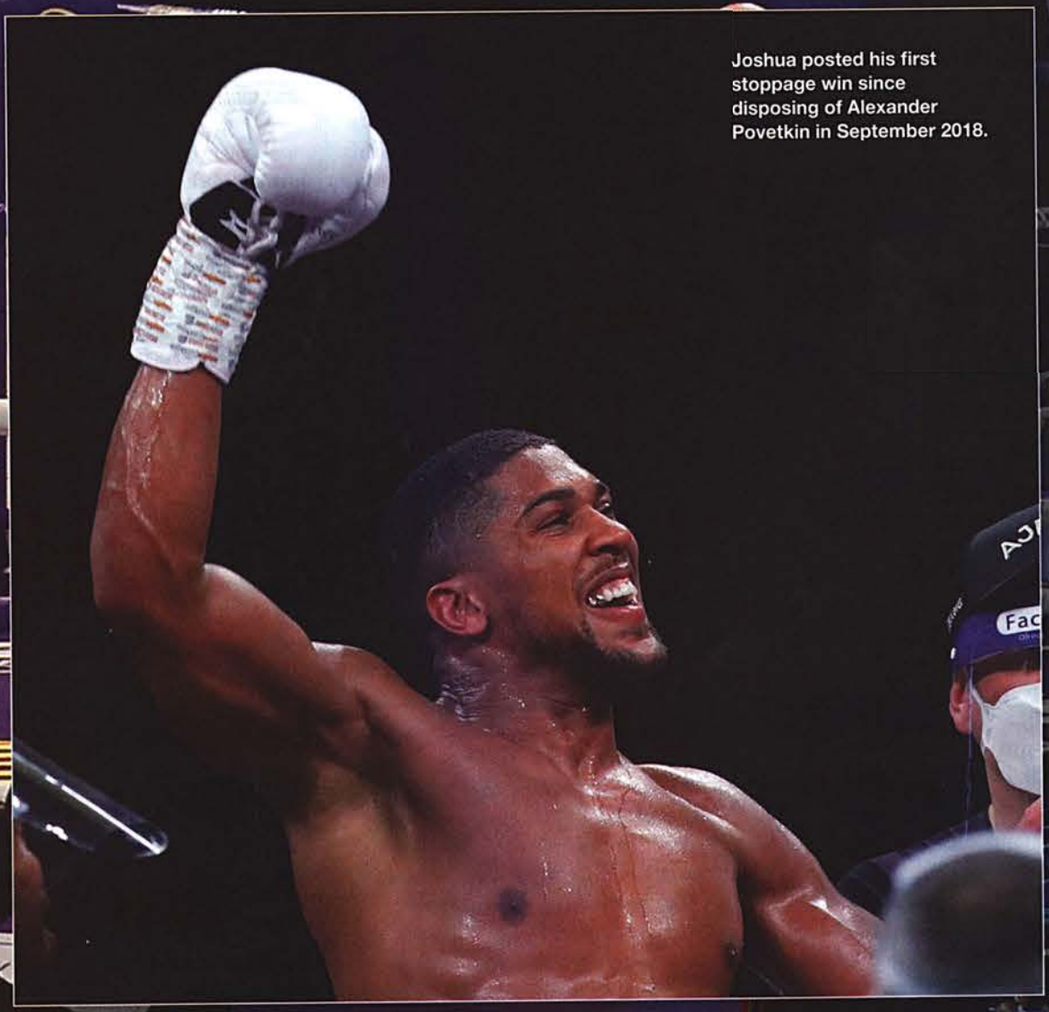
After pleading guilty to a lesser offense and performing court-mandated community service, Joshua dedicated himself to boxing. In 2010, no less an authority than Tyson Fury (then 22 years old with a dozen professional victories on his resume) sparred with Anthony and told commentator Steve Bunce, "He's red hot. I thought, 'I have got to take it easy, because he is only an amateur and he probably won't spar again if I go mad.' He rushed out at me and threw a one-two, left hook, and I slipped and slided. And bash, he hit me a big uppercut right on the point of the chin. If I had a weak chin, I would have been knocked out for a month. He is very, very, very good and young, only 20. Watch out for that name: Anthony Joshua."

Two years later, Joshua won a gold medal in the super heavyweight division at the London Olympics. Since then, he has carried himself with class, both in and out of the ring. As Tony Parsons wrote, "He is a warrior and a gentleman. In the toxic trash-talking world of boxing – now amplified a million times on social media – he insists on treating his opponents with respect before and after the fight."

"I'm a real person," Anthony told Andrew Nagy of GQ. "I make mistakes. I'm not perfect. I'm trying, though. I really am. I'm working on myself every day."

There was a time when Joshua was The Man in the heavyweight division. On April 29, 2017, he climbed off the canvas to knock out Wladimir Klitschko in a thrilling encounter before 90,000 screaming fans at Wembley Stadium in London. Thereafter, he consolidated the WBA, IBF and WBO titles. But there were moments after the Klitschko fight when Joshua looked tentative in the ring. Some fighters walk through fire to win and are stronger for the experience. Others, having been badly hurt once (as Joshua was against Klitschko), are less confident.

On June 1, 2019, Joshua (then 22-0 with 21 knockouts) was beaten into submission at Madison Square Garden over seven rounds by Andy Ruiz (a 20-to-1 underdog). Six months later, they



Joshua posted his first stoppage win since disposing of Alexander Povetkin in September 2018.

fought again; this time in Saudi Arabia. Ruiz – a shade over six feet tall – weighed in for the rematch at 283 pounds. He was so out of shape that his back was jiggling.

Joshua jabbed and moved ("ran" if one is being less kind) for most of the fight en route to winning a lackluster unanimous decision. This wasn't a young Muhammad Ali outboxing a young Mike Tyson. Bart Barry summed up matters nicely when he wrote, "It was a fat guy versus a nervous one and it failed all expectations. Trust yourself, dear aficionado. Trust your gut on this one. A pundit writing or saying that [Ruiz-Joshua II] was anything better than woeful does so with the same integrity as a waiter embellishing the daily specials or a flight attendant thanking you for loyalty to her airline. Saturday was just awful."

"The belts can be your best friend or your best enemy," Joshua said when Ruiz-Joshua II was over. "It just depends on you as a person. Trust me. It's not all fun."

Later, Anthony would look back on 2019 and observe, "The pressure that I went through last year was tough, but it made me mentally stronger. I grew a thicker skin. Just because I took a loss from Ruiz, I don't think that's enough to change someone. Every fighter trains hard, but it's character that separates us, and I've got a lot of character."

This brings us to Joshua-Pulev. The fight had originally been scheduled for October 2017, but Pulev was forced to withdraw because of a muscle injury. Their 2020 confrontation was postponed several times because of COVID-19 issues and eventually slated for December 12 at the O2 Dome in London. Then, on December 2, Matchroom (Joshua's promoter) announced that the bout was being moved to the smaller SSE Arena at Wembley. One thousand fans were allowed to attend. Tickets were priced from 100 to 1,000 pounds.

The AJ right hand is as concussive as ever, and it was that very shot that ended Pulev's night in Round 9.

Pulev came into the contest with a 28-1 (14 KOs) record. But he's 39 years old (eight years older than Joshua) and had been maneuvered into position as the IBF mandatory challenger by picking over the carcasses of aging heavyweights who were long past their prime. In his one previous title bout, he'd been knocked out in 2014 by Wladimir Klitschko (the final knockout of Klitschko's ring career).

Immediately after the weigh-in for Joshua-Pulev, Anthony cautioned his opponent, "Don't let the guys who you've fought gas you up. You're in against a real one now."

Bulgarians have won 16 Olympic gold medals in wrestling, 12 in weightlifting and four in boxing. But their success in professional boxing has been negligible.

Bob Arum (who co-promotes Pulev) beat the drums for his fighter, declaring, "I think Pulev is gonna beat Joshua. I really do. Look, Andy Ruiz is a good kid. He fought most of his fights for us. But the fact that he could knock out Joshua says volumes about Joshua. And the rematch that they had, I mean, that doesn't count. Ruiz wasn't in any kind of shape. He came in fat and Joshua was reluctant to engage with him. So, I really think Pulev, who's a big, tough Bulgarian, is gonna knock Joshua out."

Pulev echoed that theme, saying, "We waited a long time for this fight. In 2017, I had a problem and that's why I said to my trainer we must go for the win, not to fight now but fight a couple of years later. I knew the fight would come one day. I'm here now, ready to fight and win ... This fight is for all of Bulgaria. Nobody from my country has ever been heavyweight champion of the world. That is why it will be so good for my country and my people. Bulgarian fans will be really happy."

Joshua weighed in for the bout at 240.8 pounds, Pulev at 239.7. That was a good weight for each fighter. There was some aggressive back-and-forth posturing at the weigh-in (which the promotion hoped would pump up pay-per-view buys). But after the weigh-in, the fighters fist-bumped and Pulev told Joshua that he liked and respected him.

An Anthony Joshua prizefight is always an event. But the fight itself was short on drama. My notes on the bout read as follows:

Round 1 - A feeling-out round. Joshua a bit more active. Neither fighter doing much.

Round 2 - Joshua picks up the pace a bit. Pulev doing nothing to score points and not seeking to engage.

Round 3 - Joshua right hand stuns Pulev. Anthony goes for the kill. Big uppercuts. Pulev turns his back and stumbles into the ropes. Referee calls it a knockdown. Joshua pummeling Pulev, drops him again with an uppercut. Pulev survives the round.

Round 4 - Pulev hanging tough, but that's all he's doing.

Round 5 - Pulev is game, but he can't compete at Joshua's level. It's target practice for A.J.

Round 6 - Pulev throwing his right hand with a bit more conviction.

Round 7 - Joshua taking his time. He has a stationary target in front of him.

Round 8 - Pulev's most competitive round so far. But he needs a KO to win and he's not a power-puncher.

Round 9 - Series of uppercuts drop Pulev. A right hand finishes him. KO 9.

So . . . What comes next?

Let's start with the fact that, at present, Tyson Fury is the number one heavyweight in the world. Joshua-Ruiz I was about dethroning a king. Deontay Wilder-Fury II was about crowning a new one. Fury established his supremacy in the heavyweight division with his seven-round demolition of Wilder on February 22, 2020.

Wilder had a contractual right to a third fight against Fury with a designated purse split between them prior to Fury defending his title against another opponent. But the size of the pie for Fury-Wilder III was uncertain. Each man had been guaranteed in excess of $20 million for their second fight and was unwilling to take a significant pay cut for a third. And despite a massive promotional campaign that included heavy hype during the Super Bowl on FOX and the college football Bowl Championship Series finals on ESPN, the Wilder-Fury II promotion fell roughly 400,000 pay-per-view buys short of what it needed to break even. And that was with a live gate of $16,916,440 that can't be duplicated in the coronavirus era.

Fury now says that, since Fury-Wilder III didn't occur within a contractually mandated five-month window, he's free to fight whomever he wants. Indeed, Tyson was planning to fight Agit Kabayel on December 5. But Fury-Kabayel fell apart because ESPN wouldn't pay what was necessary to meet Team Fury's financial demands unless the bout was contested in prime time in the United States (which would have placed it between 4 and 5 a.m. in the United Kingdom).

Team Wilder is currently seeking to enforce what it claims is its contractual right to a third fight against Fury through the legal process.

Joshua has a WBO mandatory defense due against Aleksandr Usyk. Usyk was an elite cruiserweight. But despite weighing 217 pounds for an October 31 fight against Derek Chisora, the Ukrainian looked physically overmatched and without a heavyweight punch en route to winning a dreary 115-113, 115-113, 117-112 decision.

Joshua-Usyk would be a mediocre fight. One hopes that it won't get in the way of bigger and better things – specifically, a potential megafight between Joshua and Fury.

In truth, Fury-Joshua would be of limited interest in the United States. If the two fighters walked through the heart of any city in America, few people other than hardcore boxing fans would recognize them. And that number wouldn't increase by much if Deontay Wilder was walking with them. The most common reaction from passers-by would be "maybe they're basketball players."

But Fury-Joshua, even if it took place in the Middle East (which Bob Arum, who co-promotes Fury, says is likely), would be a huge event in the United Kingdom.

The winner of Fury-Joshua would be the UNDISPUTED heavyweight champion of the world (although there would still be the nagging question of, "How would Joshua fare against Wilder?").

Meanwhile, let it be said that Joshua is a breath of fresh air in boxing. For starters, he has steadfastly refused to engage in what has become the unfortunate ritual of fighters demeaning their opponents. "When you disrespect another fighter," Joshua has said, "you disrespect the sport. You shouldn't do that to other athletes. 'He's shit; he's this; he's that.' It reflects badly on boxing, calling people bums. There's a way to do it: 'He's a good fighter, but I'm better!'"

At his best, Joshua is a very good fighter. He has a damaging right hand and a concussive uppercut. He's still a work in progress. But unlike Wilder, he's progressing.

"I went through a lot of my career not even knowing what I was doing," Anthony said recently. "I was just fighting. I watched the (Eric) Molina fight the other day; I watched a bit of the (Carlos) Takam fight; I watched the Klitschko fight. And I was like, 'Wow! How was I in these type of fights with the little bit of experience that I had?'"

Joshua was a bit overrated before. He might be a bit underrated now.

And let's not forget: Joshua has the memory of standing in the ring, looking down at the multitudes after defeating Wladimir Klitschko to become King of the World. The power of that moment is near unimaginable. He wants that feeling again. Against Tyson Fury. With a roaring crowd. For the right to be called King of the World and King of England.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – *was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In December 2019, it was announced that he had been selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.*

Battered and bloodied – the first defeat of Wilder's professional career came against Tyson Fury in Las Vegas.

DEONTAY'S DOWNWARD SPIRAL

THE FORMER HEAVYWEIGHT TITLEHOLDER IS STILL LAYING BLAME FOR HIS TKO LOSS TO TYSON FURY ON EVERYTHING BUT HIMSELF

By **David Greisman**

Excuses. Accusations of cheating. Conspiracy theories.

We didn't need the most recent presidential election to show us what happens when someone who isn't used to losing can't come to terms with defeat. Boxing has already been there for nearly a year.

Deontay Wilder's dramatic knockout loss to Tyson Fury took place in Las Vegas on February 22, 2020. All of that time hasn't healed all of his wounds. The mental scars remain. In seemingly every month since, in seemingly every interview, Wilder has pointed fingers in several directions, toward suspects and scapegoats, but never blamed himself.

His corner ended the fight too soon, he said on fight night. The costume Wilder wore on his way to the ring was too heavy and took away his legs, he said days after the loss. Tyson Fury's gloves were tampered with in both the first bout and the rematch, he said later on. And Wilder's trainer, the same one who waved things off in the seventh, sabotaged him with poisoned water.

"If I'm going to lose, allow me to lose fair and square," Wilder told Brian Custer of Showtime in a November podcast. "Don't cheat me. You got to cheat me to beat me."

Wilder isn't the first fighter to get knocked to the canvas and then sink even lower into a downward spiral. He isn't even the first heavyweight champion to embarrass himself like this. Losing is hard enough. It's more difficult when all you've done is win for more than a decade. Wilder hadn't been on the short end of a fight since 2008, when he captured Olympic bronze, the lone bright spot for an American boxing team that didn't earn any other medals.

Since then, Wilder had developed from that raw prospect in Beijing into a heavyweight world champion with electric superpowers. He could turn off another man's lights while simultaneously sending a surge of energy through those watching in the arena and on television, providing some much-needed juice to a division that had far too many boring fights for far too long. Wilder won a title in 2015 and had reigned for five years. Only one other active fighter had held his belt longer, and that was all the way on the lowest end of the scale, strawweight Wanheng Menayothin.

That staying power was more than had been expected of a fighter so widely derided for his flaws, whose critics accused him of benefiting from careful management and weak opposition and predicted he'd be exposed once his team stopped protecting him.

Wilder deserved more credit than that. He was up for tough challenges, on his way to Russia to defend against Alexander Povetkin when Povetkin tested positive for a banned substance, giving Luis Ortiz a title shot when no other notable heavyweight was willing. And Wilder was tough when these tough challenges finally came about, showing both his chin and his mettle in that war with Ortiz, proving what he could do against a good boxer who could counter and crack.

So here he was, one of the deserving members of the heavyweight triumvirate, among the best of boxing's marquee division alongside Fury and Anthony Joshua. Wilder and Fury both remained in consideration after they met in late 2018. The fight ended a hotly debated draw. Fury boxed well, but he was dropped twice and barely beat the count after the second knockdown. Wilder, meanwhile, could assuage himself with the fact that he was half a second away from knocking Fury out.

And so Wilder bought into the prevailing sentiment entering the rematch, the belief that Fury needed to box perfectly for 12 rounds in order to win, while Wilder only needed to land one perfect punch. Wilder had a penchant for yelling out "Bomb Squad!" yet it was Fury who had the perilous job of defusing him. Or so we thought.

Instead, it was Fury who brought out the heavy artillery. It was Wilder who was on the canvas twice, Wilder who was hurt repeatedly, and Wilder who didn't make it to the final bell. Here was the knockout artist, the destroyer, the wrecking ball, and there

JOHN GLAZNISKI

he was in shambles.

It wasn't necessarily humiliating – almost every fighter loses eventually, and there should be more pride than shame when that loss comes against one of the best – but it should have been humbling. It should have been a reality check.

Wilder has yet to realize that reality.

"Things like this happen. The best man won tonight," Wilder said on that February night, far more rational mere minutes after losing than he would be later on. His biggest complaint at that moment was that Mark Breland, the Olympic champ and former pro titleholder who'd long worked as Wilder's co-trainer, had thrown in the towel as Fury landed several heavy shots in the seventh. "I just wish that my corner would've let me go out on my shield. I'm a warrior and that's what I do."

He'd mentioned leg problems and other cryptic issues but didn't go into detail. "I make no excuses tonight," he said.

The excuses instead came out within days. They haven't stopped, festering into a rotten deluge of weird explanations and wild allegations, a torrent of unfortunate events, unjust actions and unprovable conspiratorial conduct.

It wasn't just Wilder. He fed an entire cottage industry of YouTube videos, podcasts and articles that pored over footage of the two Wilder-Fury fights – particularly the first fight – as if they were the Zapruder footage, finding damning-looking snippets and connecting them to make the case that Fury was a cheater, and that Deontay Wilder had been cheated. Others disagreed, challenging their charges, debunking their discoveries, a pointed debate that quickly became pointless. Wilder's supporters were too entrenched. They saw what they wanted to see, believed what they wanted to believe. Their observations and outrage, in turn, fed back into Wilder.

"It's beyond the loss," he told Showtime's Custer. "I've been done wrong."

Fury is undefeated against Wilder, inside and outside the ring.

It's not beyond the loss, though. The loss itself drives this search for answers, this careening from one reason to another. Deontay Wilder had never gotten his ass kicked like this before. He was shellacked and left shellshocked. To him, that outcome was not merely barely possible, but completely implausible. It couldn't just be that Fury had a better fight than Wilder that night. There had to be another explanation – or explanations.

There was the elaborate 40-pound outfit for his ringwalk: "I didn't have no legs from the beginning of the fight," Wilder told Kevin Iole of Yahoo! Sports less than 48 hours after the bout. In the same run of media interviews, he told BoxingScene's Keith Idec that Fury fought dirty, leaning on him and weakening his legs further.

There was Breland, who Wilder accused of everything from negligence – ignoring his wishes – to nefariousness. In February, Wilder claimed Breland was influenced by former 168-pound titleholder Anthony Dirrell yelling from ringside for the fight to be stopped; Dirrell works with Fury's trainer, Javan "SugarHill" Steward. (Dirrell says he never shouted this.) More recently, Wilder accused Breland of putting something in his water, which weakened him right before the fight began.

And then there was fury toward Fury. "I highly believe you put something hard in your glove, something the size and the shape of an egg weight," Wilder said on Instagram in late October. "It's the reason why the side of my face swelled up in a egg-weight form, and it left a dent in my face as well." Wilder had also latched onto the conspiracy videos, questioning Fury's loose left glove in the first fight and photos from the second fight showing Fury's right fist looking "smushed-in."

We're not going to relitigate all of these accusations here. Hundreds of people already made thousands of posts and videos and tweets over the

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course of weeks and months. We'd need a lot more space to fully explain everything, and a lot more time to even try to change your mind.

Wilder's spate of excuses is similar to when another big man, Wladimir Klitschko, came tumbling down. After Klitschko was stopped by Lamon Brewster in 2004, his second TKO loss in 13 months, his team came out with a series of comical claims and strange speculation. Like Wilder, they wondered if Klitschko's water was drugged. Like Wilder, they fired a team member, in this case cutman Joe Souza. According to Team Klitschko, Souza had applied too much Vaseline to Klitschko's body, supposedly clogging his pores and making him overheat.

Wilder's circumstance is also reminiscent of other fighters. Manny Pacquiao blamed bad socks for his draw with Juan Manuel Marquez. Mike Tyson and Don King argued that Buster Douglas had been given a long count. Miguel Cotto believed that Antonio Margarito's tainted hand wraps prior to Margarito vs. Shane Mosley in 2009 undeniably meant Margarito had loaded his gloves before battering Cotto six months before.

It's a misguided approach, even if we grant that athletes can be motivated by a chip on their shoulder and a taste for revenge. "If only this hadn't happened to me," they think, when instead they should be examining what they could've done better.

"That [Brewster] fight was completely the turning point of my life, not just my career, but my life," Klitschko told boxing writer Dan Rafael years later. "I changed the way I wanted to do things. There is no way I would be champion today without that loss. I got to know the other side in the hardest way."

Klitschko studied his flaws and mistakes and altered his style. He regained his confidence and did away with cockiness. He now knew he could get hurt, dropped, tired and stopped. He'd since learned how to prevent it, or fight through it, and win. Pacquiao got better socks, of course, but he also added more dimensions and developed into a much more well-rounded fighter. Cotto won his rematch with Margarito, not because of his opponent's hand wraps, but because he boxed better and took less punishment. Tyson, in contrast, never learned from his errors.

Wilder, for all of his improvements, still made a lot of mistakes coming into the rematch with Fury and many more once the bell rang. His biggest mistake would be to assume that he did no wrong – but rather that he was done wrong – and that stopping the cheating alone would be enough to make the third fight different.

Wilder believes that Fury has a history of cheating. Beyond their two fights, there's Fury's positive test for a banned substance following his win over Christian Hammer, and the fact that the thumb section of Fury's right glove was detached and needed to be fixed before the Hammer fight began.

"Once a cheater cheats, and he can't cheat no more, that right there brings his confidence down. He can't do certain things," Wilder told Custer. "There ain't nothing that Fury did special at all. It just was what I wasn't able to do because of the circumstances that I was in." To Wilder's credit, he also said he'd bring in different trainers. Wilder recently hired a former opponent, Malik Scott, to take Breland's place.

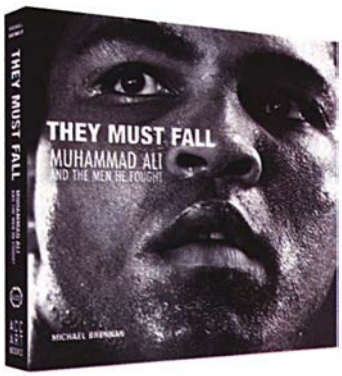
It was Fury who had adjusted after the first fight, who recognized the folly of trying to box perfectly, who adopted the strategy of bullying the bully and fighting fire with fire. Now it is Wilder who must adapt. The conspiracy theories won't do him any good. There's no use in getting mad if you don't know how to get even.

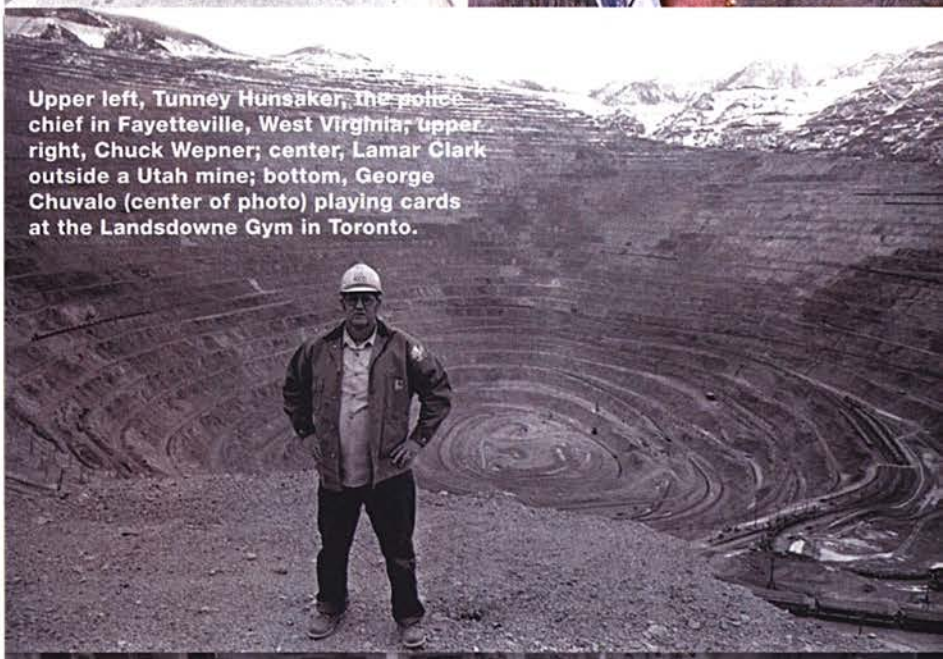
Wilder insists that his pre-fight garb was too heavy for his legs to handle.

Follow David Greisman on Twitter @FightingWords2. His book, Fighting Words: The Heart and Heartbreak of Boxing, *is available on Amazon.*

THEY MUST FALL: MUHAMMAD ALI AND THE MEN HE FOUGHT

Book Review by **Thomas Hauser**





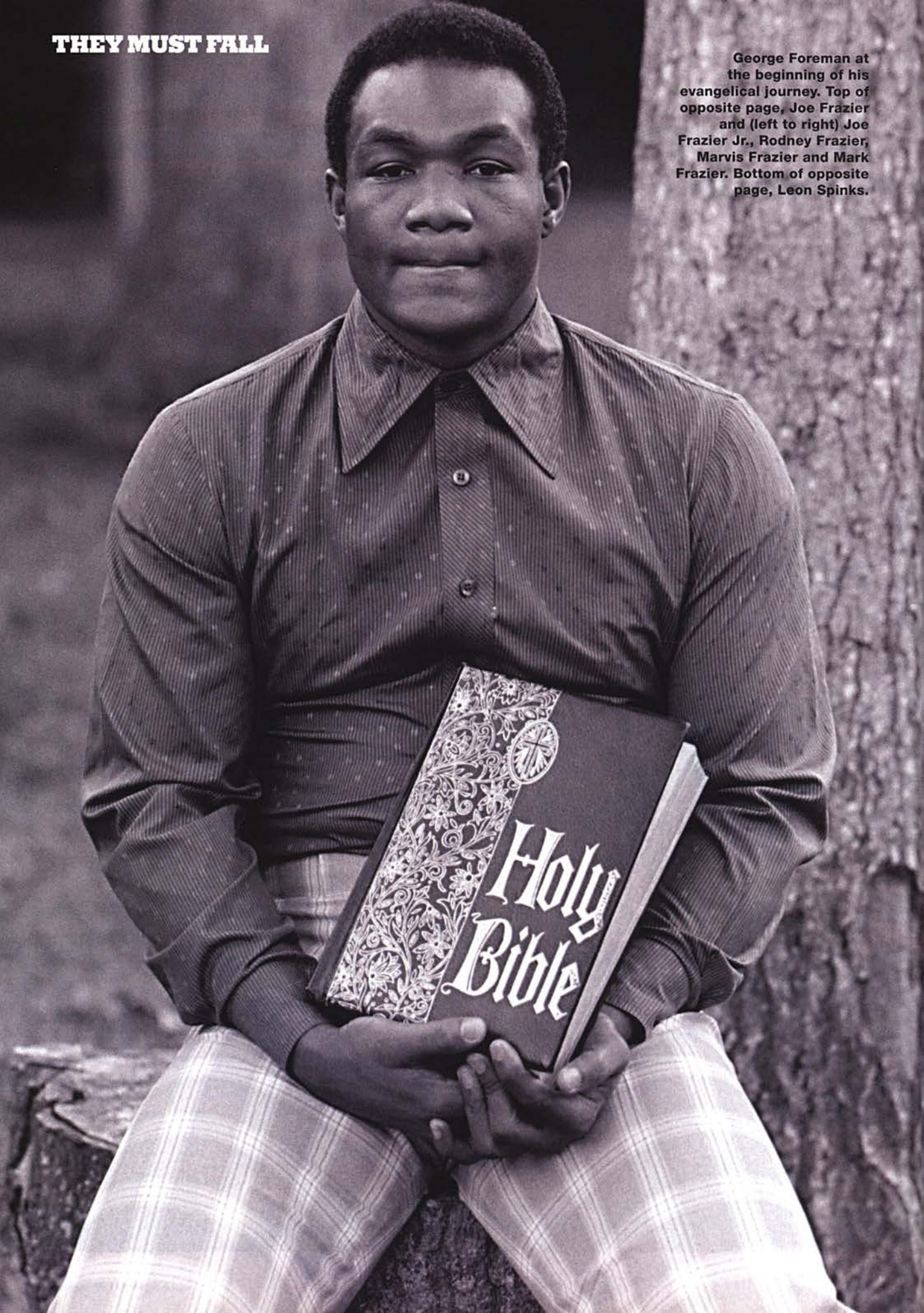
Upper left, Tunney Hunsaker, the police chief in Fayetteville, West Virginia; upper right, Chuck Wepner; center, Lamar Clark outside a Utah mine; bottom, George Chuvalo (center of photo) playing cards at the Landsdowne Gym in Toronto.

They Must Fall: Muhammad Ali and the Men He Fought (photographs by Michael Brennan, published by ACC Art Books) is the latest addition to the long list of Muhammad Ali photo books.

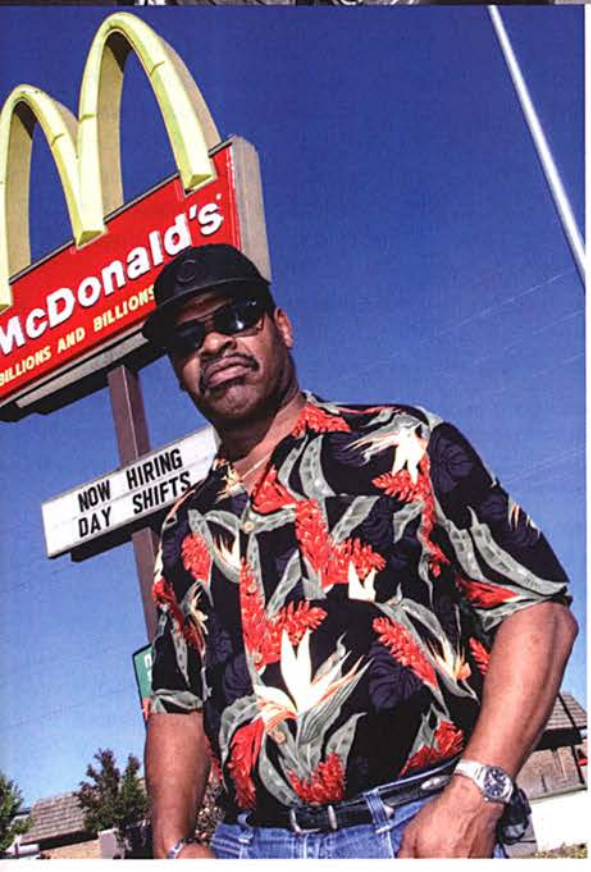
The first half of *They Must Fall* consists largely of images of Ali, chronologically arranged. There are action photos from Ali-Frazier II, one action photo from Ali-Holmes and quite a few photos from Ali's training camp in Deer Lake, Pennsylvania. The second half of the book features images of 25 of the 50 men whom Ali fought. The book concludes with a short section of photos of Ali in his late 50s.

They Must Fall has a ponderous introduction by Simon Van Booy, who characterizes Joe Frazier, George Foreman and Larry Holmes as being among the "unsung heroes" who were "immortalized forever by Brennan."

Top, Buster Mathis; bottom left, Duke Sabedong; bottom right, Larry Holmes with his baby daughter, Kandy.



George Foreman at the beginning of his evangelical journey. Top of opposite page, Joe Frazier and (left to right) Joe Frazier Jr., Rodney Frazier, Marvis Frazier and Mark Frazier. Bottom of opposite page, Leon Spinks.



That's followed by a factually inaccurate essay written by Jimmy Breslin in 2006 that, among other things, says that Ali knocked out Sonny Liston in the second round in Lewiston, Maine. The photo captions are pedestrian.

But photo books are primarily about the photographs, not the text. And some of Brennan's photos of Ali's opponents are exceptionally good. There's a fresh quality to them. They aren't the same tired images that boxing fans have seen hundreds of times before.

Most of the men Ali fought were living lives devoid of glamour when Brennan found them. Jimmy Robinson was homeless in Miami. Lamar Clark was working in a mine in Utah. Alex Miteff was driving a limousine in New York. Buster Mathis weighed close to 500 pounds and had a job loading trucks in Michigan. George Logan was a truant officer in Idaho. Leon Spinks was working at a McDonald's in Nebraska. Herb Siler and Tony Esperti were in prison; Siler for shooting his girlfriend to death, Esperti for being the trigger-man in a mob execution.

They Must Fall is a welcome addition to the Ali library. The Ring is pleased to share some of Brennan's photographs on these pages.

Thomas Hauser's email address is thomashauserwriter@gmail.com. His most recent book – Staredown: Another Year Inside Boxing – *was published by the University of Arkansas Press. In 2004, the Boxing Writers Association of America honored Hauser with the Nat Fleischer Award for career excellence in boxing journalism. In December 2019, it was announced that he had been selected for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.*

WORLD BEAT

PHILIPPINES

BY RYAN SONGALIA

In a year with so many disruptions, how does one have a proper year-end awards article? It's tough when Manny Pacquiao doesn't have a fight lined up, Jerwin Ancajas is limited to sparring Jonas Sultan at a house in Southern California without a date, and Reymart Gaballo and the debuting Eumir Marcial all have fights scheduled for after this column's deadline. Boxing shows in the Philippines came to a halt for seven months between March and October and are only now slowly crawling back without live audiences.

Still, much did occur in Philippine boxing during the calendar year of 2020, and Filipino boxers found ways to carve out their own headlines in a year that was difficult for everyone in the sport. Their sacrifice and determination was even more admirable because of the circumstances, not in spite of them.

Performance of the Year: John Riel Casimero TKO 3 Duke Micah • Sept. 26, Mohegan Sun Casino, Uncasville, Conn.

This could apply as easily to the fight as it does the interview afterward, but John Riel Casimero finally found his opportunity to make an impression on American audiences. The 31-year-old from Ormoc City had been scheduled to unify his WBO bantamweight title with pound-for-pound entrant Naoya Inoue, but when the pandemic scrapped that battle, Casimero took his frustrations out on the undefeated Micah.

Casimero came out winging hard shots from the opening bell, scoring a knockdown in Round 2 before an uppercut in the third wobbled Micah again and forced a referee's stoppage. Casimero celebrated by doing one-handed pushups on the canvas and then called out Inoue in a profanity-laden interview that would qualify him as the Filipino Ricardo Mayorga.

The fight took place on the Charlo brothers' pay-per-view card, offering the three-division titleholder Casimero his first significant international media exposure that didn't involve him hiding under the ring during a riot. [Editor's note: search "Lazarte vs. Casimero boxing riot" on YouTube if you don't get this reference.]

You don't have to like Casimero or his attitude, but you have to respect his fighting spirit.

Knockout of the Year: Jameson Bacon KO 2 Roque Junco • Nov. 20, Media Plus Studios, Hialeah, Fla.

This would have been an easy fight to miss if not for spectators having cell phones filming. Bacon (25-4, 17 KOs) of Cebu City missed with an uppercut but came right back with a left hook that caught Junco with his chin hanging in the air, putting him out cold. That Baconator with extra cheese left no need for a count and earned the Sanman Promotions fighter his second straight win.

Upset of the Year: Mike Plania MD 10 Joshua Greer Jr. • June 16, MGM Grand, Las Vegas

When Top Rank was preparing to bring boxing back to U.S. airwaves after a couple of months of silence, I told Al Jazeera that there were some hidden gems in the schedule, including Plania vs. Greer. Expectations were somewhat skewed by the fact that so few had seen Plania, and because Greer was the No. 1 contender for the WBO bantamweight title. But after scoring a pair of knockdowns and winning a decision, a few more people knew who Plania was. The 23-year-old Plania (24-1, 12 KOs) of General Santos City happened to be in the right place at the right time, having been stranded in Miami with his other Sanman stablemates, and was ready to step in when Top Rank came calling.

Plania (left) shocks pre-fight favorite Greer.

Shocker of the Year: ALA Boxing closing shop

In hindsight, we all should have seen this one coming. ALA, which had been the country's leading promoter, had become less consistent with putting on shows, even prior to the pandemic. Mark Magsayo, their next in line as a main event star, had walked away after his contract expired, and their two biggest stars, Donnie Nietes and Milan Melindo, were aging quickly.

Still, that August press release, which stated the company would fold, the iconic gym in Cebu City would close and fighters like Nietes and KJ Cataraja would become free agents, caught people off guard. The company, which was founded by Antonio Aldeguer in 1985, had risen to national prominence with an amateur squad that produced Gerry Penalosa, Edito Villamor and Andy Tabanas, but the company had lagged behind in recent years with talent production as Sanman began recruiting top amateurs to join its stable and former ALA agent Sammy Gello-ani emerged with Casimero and Marvin Sonsona.

"Hay naku!" Moment of the Year: Mark John Yap missing weight by 9 pounds

For the most hardcore of fans in the Philippines and Japan, Yap is best remembered as a blood-and-guts warrior from Cagayan de Oro City

who overcame losing streaks to win the OPBF bantamweight title and fight his way to a title eliminator. Unfortunately for Yap, the rest of the world will remember him for blowing weight by two divisions.

Yap, who was going to headline an ESPN card in July against Miguel Marriaga, stepped on the scale at 136.7 pounds, which would be fine if he was fighting a non-title lightweight bout but is far less acceptable for a featherweight bout. The fight had to be scrapped, and Yap momentarily became the butt of boxing Twitter's jokes.

A week earlier, Yap had told this columnist he was 10 pounds over the weight, had taken the fight on two weeks' notice and had no training or sparring for the fight. Considering all that, of course this was the end result.

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

It's the season for listing the year's best in boxing. The following fighters and fights were the best from Japan and of the Japanese fight scene in 2020:

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

Naoya Inoue (20-0, 17 KOs) – The pound-for-pound-rated bantamweight champ defended his Ring Magazine, WBA and IBF titles with a smart, seventh-round KO of Jason Moloney in his Las Vegas debut in October.
RUNNERS-UP: Junto Nakatani (21-0, 16 KOs) – The Ring-rated flyweight beat Giemel Magramo via eighth-round KO to win the vacant WBO title in November. • Masayoshi Nakatani (19-1, 13 KOs) – The rugged lightweight contender got up from two knockdowns to sensationally stop Felix Verdejo in the ninth round of their thriller in Las Vegas in December.

FIGHT OF THE YEAR

Kenichi Ogawa UD 10 Kazuhiro Nishitani – Former junior lightweight title challenger Ogawa (25-1-1, 18 KOs) and former Japanese lightweight champ Nishitani (21-5-1, 12 KOs) clashed in a non-title, 10-round main event at Tokyo's Korakuen Hall in October. After trading knockdowns in the third and fourth rounds during a wild first half of the fight, the harder- and quicker-punching Ogawa gradually took control to a unanimous decision victory, but Nishitani remained tough to the end.
RUNNERS-UP: Tatsuya Yanagi TKO 6 Kazuki Saito, lightweights, October • Yoshimitsu Kimura D 8 Shuma Nakazato, junior lightweights, November • Ryoji Fukunaga TKO 10 Kenta Nakagawa, junior bantamweight, December • (All three slugfests took place at Korakuen Hall)

UPSET OF THE YEAR

Riku Nagahama UD 12 Kudura Kaneko – Nagahama (12-2-1, 4 KOs) shocked heavily favored and previously undefeated Afghanistan immigrant Kudura Kaneko (11-1, 8 KOs) to earn the vacant OPBF welterweight title in Tokyo in February.
RUNNER-UP: Rei Nakajima SD 8 Shinobu "Charlie" Hosokawa – Inexperienced (only three bouts under his belt) and undersized (5-foot-5½) Rei Nakajima outboxed the bigger, stronger, more experienced former OPBF middleweight champ Hosokawa (12-6-1, 11 KOs) in Tokyo in October. The upset shot Nakajima to the No. 5 spot in the Japan ratings.

COMEBACK OF THE YEAR

Kenichi Horikawa – Two-time Japanese junior flyweight champion Horikawa (41-16-1, 14 KOs) stopped Daiki Tomita (15-2, 5 KOs) in the 10th round of a 12-round bout for the vacant OPBF belt in Osaka in July. The 40-year-old Horikawa, who was attempting to rebound from losing his national title to Yuto Takahashi in October 2019, dominated his 17-years-younger opponent until dropping him with a straight right to stop the fight. The 21-year veteran is finally in position to challenge for his first world title.

KO OF THE YEAR

Etsuko Tada KO 9 Ayaka Miyao – Tada (20-3-3, 7 KOs), the former WBA/IBF/WBO strawweight titleholder, scored an impressive one-punch KO of Miyao (23-9-2, 6 KOs), the former WBA atomweight beltholder, eight seconds into the ninth round to regain the vacant WBO title at Korakuen Hall in December. Tada, a tall southpaw, was in a good position to deal with Miyao's aggression and dropped her face-first. Ten months after holding Tada to a split draw, Miyao left the ring on a stretcher in their rematch. Tada, who turns 40 in May, proved she's still in her prime and still dangerous.
RUNNER-UP: Masamichi Yabuki KO 1 Tsuyoshi Sato – The lanky, hard-hitting Yabuki (11-3, 11 KOs) blasted southpaw Sato (10-2-1, 5 KOs) in just two minutes and 55 seconds to take the vacant Japanese junior flyweight throne in Kariya in July. Yabuki dropped Sato with a left hook and then finished him with a short right counter.

PROSPECT OF THE YEAR

Andy Hiraoka (16-0, 11 KOs) – The talented junior welterweight won his last two bouts in Las Vegas, his most recent fight a four-round stoppage of capable American journeyman Rickey Edwards in October. The 24-year-old southpaw, currently rated No. 12 by the IBF, is a stablemate of Naoya Inoue and has signed with Top Rank.
RUNNERS-UP: Shuichiro Yoshino (13-0, 10 KOs) – The skilled lightweight puncher stopped Izuki Tomioka in the eighth round in defense of his Japanese and OPBF titles in February and then scored a unanimous decision over former Japanese junior welterweight champ Valentine Hosokawa in September. Yoshino is now rated in the top 15 of four major sanctioning organizations. • Musashi Mori (12-0, 7 KOs) – The featherweight southpaw stopped brave challenger Tsuyoshi Tameda in 11 rounds to defend his WBO Asian-Pacific title in November. A 21-year-old disciple of renowned trainer Ismael Salas, Mori is scheduled to face 2021 Olympic bronze medalist Satoshi Shimizu, the current OPBF champion, in May 2021.

THE WARRIOR

Prior to Tyson Fury, the last heavyweight to win Ring Magazine Fighter of the Year more than once was Evander Holyfield. In 1996, boxing's holy warrior reigned supreme thanks to a stunning 11th-round stoppage of Mike Tyson in Las Vegas, which saw him claim the WBA title. The following year, Holyfield collected the award again thanks to a repeat win over Tyson and a TKO triumph over then-IBF titleholder Michael Moorer. Holyfield also claimed Fighter of the Year honors in 1987 as a cruiserweight, making "The Real Deal" a three-time winner.

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COMING UP

After eight years of wishful thinking by fight fans, the rematch between Ring junior bantamweight champion Juan Francisco Estrada and Roman Gonzalez is finally scheduled to happen on March 13.

JANUARY

JAN. 22 – Karim Guerfi vs. Lee McGregor, bantamweights, South Kirby, U.K. (ESPN+).
JAN. 30 – Sergey Kovalev vs. Bektemir Melikuziev, light heavyweights, Moscow (DAZN).

FEBRUARY

FEB. 13 – Joseph Diaz vs. Shavkatdzhon Rakhimov, junior lightweights (for Diaz's IBF title), Indio, Calif. (DAZN); Also, Patrick Teixeira vs. Brian Castano, junior middleweights (for Teixeira's WBO title).
FEB. 13 – Joe Smith Jr. vs. Maxim Vlasov, light heavyweights (for vacant WBO title), U.S. location TBA at press time (ESPN).
FEB. 19 – Liam Walsh vs. Paul Hyland Jr., lightweights, U.K. location TBA at press time (ESPN+).
FEB. 20 – Miguel Berchelt vs. Oscar Valdez, junior lightweights (for Berchelt's WBC title), Las Vegas (ESPN).

MARCH

MARCH 13 – Juan Francisco Estrada vs. Roman Gonzalez II, junior bantamweights (for Estrada's Ring/WBC and Gonzalez's WBA titles), location TBA at press time (DAZN).

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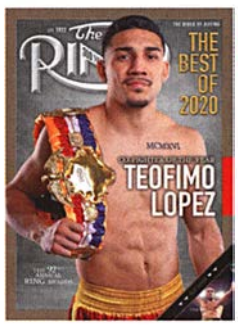
THE 92ND ANNUAL RING AWARDS

2 CO-FIGHTER OF THE YEAR: TYSON FURY
THE HEAVYWEIGHT KING RETURNED TO THE THRONE IN SPECTACULAR FASHION
By Tom Gray

6 SHARING THE HONORS
IT WAS A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER, BUT SPLITTING THE RING'S TOP HONOR DIDN'T HAPPEN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 2020
By Don Stradley

You can be sure that Fury has plenty to say about being heavyweight champion again.

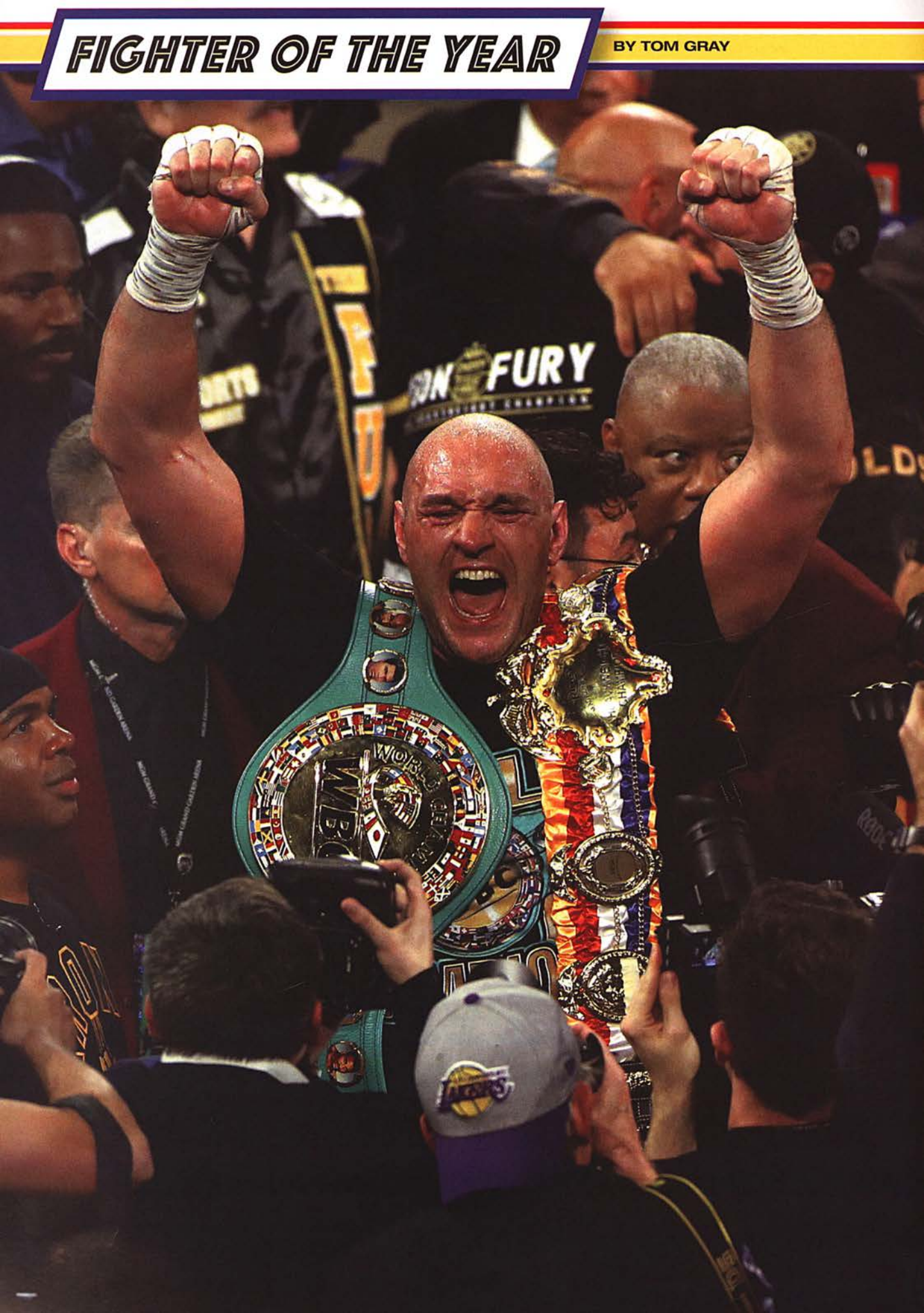


FLIP COVER
Turn the magazine over for The Ring's feature on Teofimo Lopez. See all the 2020 award winners at ringtv.com

COVER PHOTO BY MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK INC

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR

BY TOM GRAY



TYSON FURY

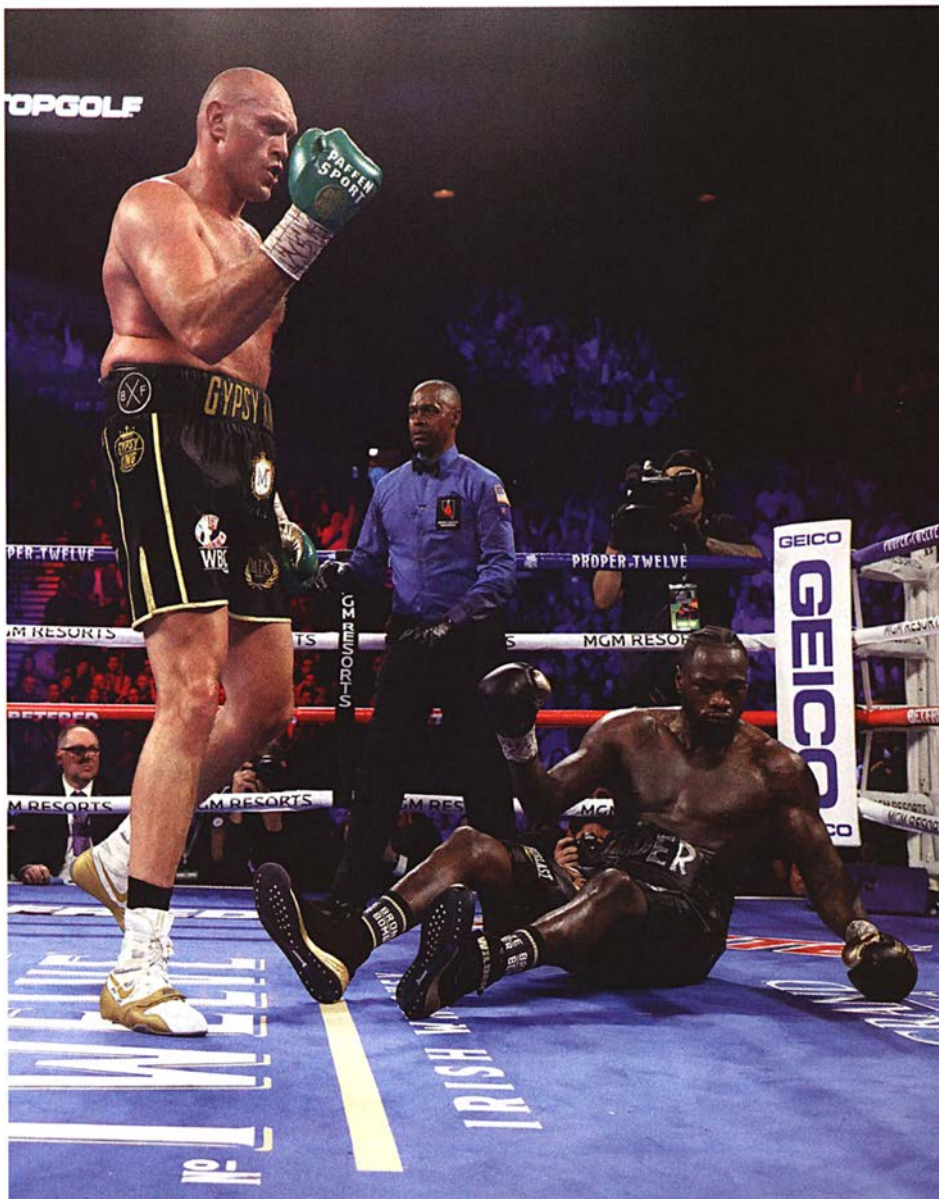
As the seconds ticked away on Deontay Wilder's five-year reign as the WBC heavyweight titleholder, the Alabama star looked like he would rather be anywhere else in the world than in a prize ring with Tyson Fury.

It was February 22, 2020, at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas and the rematch the world had been waiting for had descended into butchery. Fury, the cerebral switch-hitter, had turned into a rampaging tiger, and Wilder, the monstrous one-punch destroyer, was the helpless prey – a wounded deer awaiting the terminal strike. Predictably, another Fury right hand crashed home and the blood sprayed under the arc lights. It was at that moment when Wilder's trainer, Mark Breland, elected to throw in the towel and end the slaughter. The official result was a TKO for Fury at 1:39 of the seventh round.

The fight had been decided in just 19 minutes and 39 seconds, but Fury's journey had taken years and featured many treacherous twists and turns. After outpointing the legendary Wladimir Klitschko to become champion in November 2015, the enigmatic Fury had battled alcoholism, recreational drug use, obesity and a mental health disorder. As well as all that, the revelation that he'd tested positive for a banned substance (nandrolone) in early 2015 had damaged his reputation. However, with the UKAD case behind him and a two-year retroactive ban served, an almost unrecognizable, 400-pound version of Fury confirmed that he would return to the ring in early 2018. Some critics felt that his pursuit belonged under a circus tent.

How wrong they were!

After losing approximately 140 pounds in weight, Fury posted routine wins over Sefer Seferi (TKO 4) and Francesco Pianeta (UD 10) to set up what appeared to be a premature title shot against Wilder on December 1, 2018, in Los Angeles. Fury, however, boxed beautifully at times, befuddling the American with an unconventional mix of defensive prowess and ring generalship. Wilder struggled terribly through eight rounds, dropped his man in the ninth, and a brutal final-round knockdown looked identical to the fight-ending shots that had defined his career. However, Fury rose from the ashes, fought back hard, and he was



During a punishing display, Fury scored two clean knockdowns.

BRADLEY COLLYER; RIGHT: AL BELLO

deemed very unlucky to come out on the wrong end of a controversial split-decision draw.

Undeterred, Fury continued to shed the ring rust in 2019, easily stopping Tom Schwarz (TKO 2) and outpointing the tougher-than-expected Otto Wallin (UD 12). Meanwhile, normal service resumed for Wilder, who knocked out Dominic Breazeale (KO 1) and Luis Ortiz (KO 7) with devastating right-hand shots. The public, however, was clamoring for a rematch. Fury rooters drew confidence from the fact that Wilder couldn't beat their man when he was inactive, whereas "The Bronze Bomber's" faithful were convinced that he would put his rival on the canvas once again – and keep him there.

Never one to lack confidence, Fury was convinced that he would right the wrongs of the first encounter. "The Gypsy King" left his days of gluttony behind him, stayed in shape year-round, and he also drew strength from a new challenge. "I'm an ambassador for mental health, and I take a positive from every negative," Fury told The Ring before the rematch. "The first fight was a negative in hindsight, but it was a positive in life. It was a positive because I came back from the brink of no return. After three years out of the ring, I was back to my best and I beat the current WBC heavyweight champion. I didn't get it on the scorecards, but it was a victory in my mind.

"Deontay Wilder now has to get back in the ring with The Gypsy King for a second ass-whipping, and I'm looking forward to handing him one. I'm gonna open a can of whup-ass on this guy! I'm more active; I've had two years of activity. This is my sixth fight back, and I'll be ready."

With new coach Javan "SugarHill" Steward replacing Ben Davison, the decision was made to formulate a more aggressive game plan in order to maximize Fury's superior size and strength. Weighing in at 273 pounds (19 pounds heavier than in the first encounter) was by design, and a 231-pound version of Wilder looked like a splinter by comparison. A merciless Fury dropped his rival in the third and fifth rounds and was pitching a shutout on two of the three official scorecards when the fight was stopped. In truth, it was more mismatch than rematch.

Not only did Fury capture the WBC belt, but he also made history by regaining the Ring Magazine heavyweight championship. That title had remained vacant ever since Fury was stripped for inactivity two years earlier, and he is now one of only three men to win the belt more than once (Muhammad Ali and Floyd Patterson are the others). There were also calls for the Manchester-born colossus to enter the pound-for-pound top 10, and while he hasn't made the list yet, a place in those mythical rankings is most certainly within his grasp.

For now, Fury will have to be content with being Fighter of the Year for the second time. He received the honor in 2015 thanks to his 12-round unanimous decision win over Klitschko, and Fury now makes history once again as the only British fighter to receive this award twice. On this occasion it will be shared with his friend and Top Rank stablemate Teofimo Lopez, who scored a sensational upset win over Vasiliy Lomachenko in October.

As we go to print, the future for Fury could be labeled both simple and complex. In order to get a rematch with Wilder, the 32-year-old Englishman had to agree to a third fight in the event that he won the second. The bout was scheduled more than once in 2020, but COVID-19 and network concerns over college football dates got in the way. Fury then committed to a December tune-up, but that plan fell through when his financial requirements reportedly could not be met. There has also been talk that the long-awaited showdown with unified titleholder Anthony Joshua could take place first, should Wilder opt to go in a different direction.

Wilder hasn't had too much to say over the past several months, although he did manage to concoct some elaborate excuses for the first loss of his professional career. His pre-fight ring outfit was apparently too heavy, he may have been drugged by members of his own team, and then there were allegations that Fury's gloves were loaded with something resembling egg weights. There are fans who have bought into the conspiracy theories, but most are of the opinion that Wilder is struggling to accept what happened and is in dire need of a top-quality PR team. Regardless, a third fight sells simply because Wilder remains one of the most chilling punchers in heavyweight history.

But the trilogy is for the future. The year 2020 was an exceptional one for Tyson Fury and he deserved all the kudos that came his way. There were many who felt that he could never get into the type of condition required to compete, much less prevail at the highest level.

Given the predicament he was in, mentally and physically, and the nature of his sport, there has been talk that Fury's return to glory is among the best in sport's history. And the champion has no intention of going back to the dark side.

"I'm in a much better place," said Fury in an editorial column for The Ring Magazine earlier this year. "When I beat Wladimir Klitschko, I'd achieved what I set out to achieve and there was nothing more to prove. I didn't want to be in boxing, defending titles – I had no interest in it. I went away, had time out of the ring, ballooned up in weight and then I came back. I always need a challenge. After I beat Klitschko, there was no challenge. The real challenge for me was taking all the weight off and coming back from the brink to beat someone that nobody thought I could beat. And what happened? I beat Wilder easily, because I raise my game for different challenges."

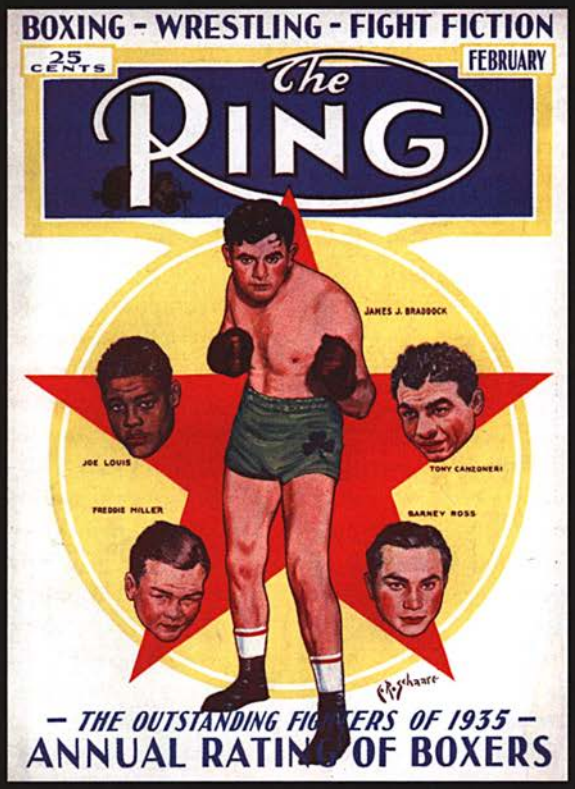
Write this man off at your peril. ★

Tom Gray is Associate Editor for Ring Magazine. Follow him on Twitter @Tom_Gray_Boxing.

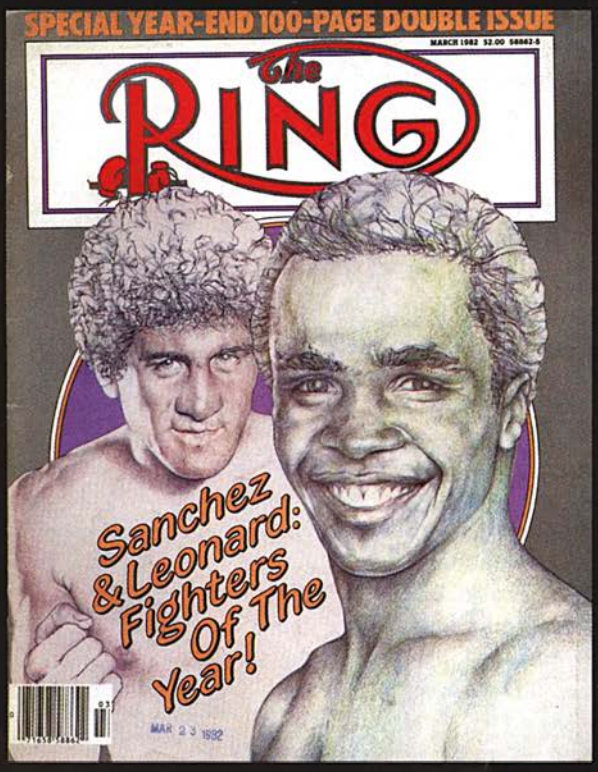
Fury was brought to the ring on a throne and wore a crown on his head, but it was his performance that left no doubt as to who was king.

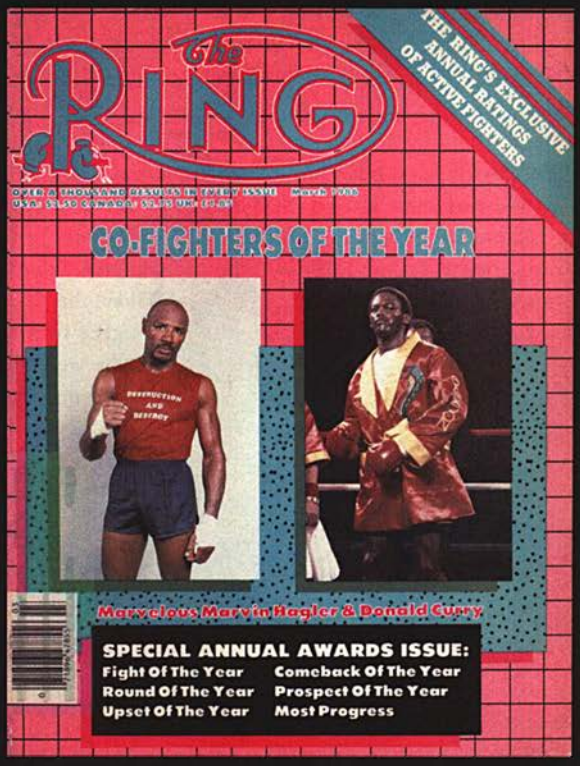
AL BELLO

FIGHTER OF THE YEAR



SHARING THE HONORS





TYSON FURY AND TEOFIMO LOPEZ AREN'T THE FIRST PAIR OF FIGHTERS TO SPLIT THE RING'S TOP AWARD IN AN EXCEPTIONAL YEAR

By **Don Stradley**

As Tyson Fury and Teofimo Lopez share The Ring's Fighter of the Year award for 2020, they become members of a very exclusive club. This is only the fifth time since our magazine began designating such awards that two fighters have tied for the top spot. There was the 1934 tie between Tony Canzoneri and Barney Ross; the 1972 toss-up between Muhammad Ali and Carlos Monzon; the dual award for Sugar Ray Leonard and Salvador Sanchez in 1981; and the 1985 deadlock between Marvelous Marvin Hagler and Donald Curry.

To differing degrees, the five pairings illustrate the polarity that exists in the boxing business. On one hand, with Fury as the most recent example, you have the wealthy star, the publicity magnet, the fighter who makes the news and fills the seats. On the other, there is Lopez, a super-talented athlete who might walk down the street unrecognized except by hardcore boxing fans. Of course, the level of a fighter's fame shouldn't be an issue at voting time. However, for many decades, the voters tended to lean toward the famous name, the fighter who kept the business hot. Even within our five ties, there has always been a mainstream favorite in the pair. Chances are he earned at least a few votes because of his place in boxing's social strata. Ali in 1972 is a case in point.

Though not a champion at the time, Ali was highly visible that year, globetrotting to locations such as Japan to beat Mac Foster, Canada to defeat George Chuvalo and Ireland to stop Alvin "Blue" Lewis. In America, he scored stoppages of Floyd Patterson, Jerry Quarry and light heavyweight champion Bob Foster. It was an excellent year for Ali – six fights, six wins, four before the final bell. Add to this his ever increasing fame, and he was a strong candidate for The Ring's highest accolade. Still, that year's voters also took note of middleweight champion Monzon.

Monzon represented the other end of the spectrum. Though a major star in his home country of Argentina, Monzon was virtually unknown in the U.S., of interest only to aficionados or those who caught his rare appearances on *ABC's Wide World of Sports*. Yet 1972 had been a special year for him, perhaps the best of his long career. His output included four title defenses, the most memorable being a 15-round decision over gritty, hard-punching Bennie Briscoe.

Monzon's year had been so strong that the Boxing Writers Association of America chose him as its own Fighter of the Year, presenting him with the Edward J. Neil trophy (since renamed as The Sugar Ray Robinson Award). Should The Ring have likewise left Ali out of the equation and focused solely on Monzon? Or did Ali really deserve to muscle in on Monzon's fabulous year?

One could easily debate in favor of Monzon. After all, Ali's opponents in 1972 were a bit of a mixed bag, including three that he'd already beaten, a couple of contenders and, in Bob Foster, a much lighter man. Also, none of Ali's bouts were major events that year. He was simply on the road, trying to make some money. Meanwhile, Monzon was fighting top-rated contenders, including European champion Jean Claude Bouttier of France and Briscoe, who was arguably America's top middleweight at the time. If Monzon had even a slight presence in the U.S., he might've surpassed Ali by a vote or two. It's almost comical to realize our March 1973 issue, in which the awards were announced, mentioned nothing about Monzon on the cover. Instead, readers were enticed with a dramatic pic from the first Ali-Joe Frazier bout.

A near mirror of the Ali-Monzon gridlock came in 1981 when Leonard and featherweight titleholder Sanchez were co-Fighters of the Year. Like Monzon, the Mexican Sanchez was adored in his home country but in America remained a cult figure, known best by serious fans. Leonard was known to anyone who owned a television and saw his famous 7 Up commercials or his dramatic wins at the 1976 Olympics. Leonard had enjoyed a splendid 1981, earning KO victories over Larry Bonds, Ayub Kalule (for a junior middleweight title) and Thomas Hearns. The Hearns bout was not only a welterweight unification fight, but was the most highly anticipated boxing event in years, made memorable by Leonard scoring an instantly legendary 14th-round TKO.

Sanchez scored four wins in 1981, including one of his career-defining moments, an eighth-round TKO over Puerto Rican superstar Wilfredo Gomez. It is difficult to say whether Leonard or Sanchez had the superior year, but it was another example of The Ring vote being split between the mainstream fighter and the fight fan's fighter. When the awards issue came out, the magazine saw fit to put both men on the cover. Not surprisingly, Leonard was the dominant figure in the layout, with the lesser-known Sanchez in the background. Sanchez may have tied with Leonard for the award, but The Ring was an American publication, and Leonard was America's sweetheart. He'd also had, let's face it, an undeniably great year.

Hagler's popularity was well below that of Ali or Leonard, but by 1985 he'd become one of the highest-earning athletes in the world and had moved to the forefront of the business with his own victory over Hearns. Despite lasting less than nine minutes, the

widely hyped Hagler-Hearns bout was hailed as one of the great action fights of all time. Under most circumstances, Hagler was a cinch for Fighter of the Year. He must've been surprised to learn he would share the honors with welterweight champion Curry. "The Lone Star Cobra," as Curry was called, had a tremendous year, winning four bouts by knockout, including his shocking two-round stoppage of Milton McCrory to unify the welterweight championship.

The Ring's motto for 1985's selection was "Between two evils, choose neither; between two goods, choose both." Hagler and Curry, the only two undisputed champions in the game that year, appeared together on the cover in identically sized photographs. Still, it was another case of the vote being split between the well-publicized, big-money fighter (Hagler) and the less-known figure with the more hardcore following (Curry). Perhaps the more active Curry deserved to ride solo, though Hagler's victory did a lot to raise boxing's profile.

Many years after the Canzoneri-Ross tie of 1934, Ring editor and founder Nat Fleischer still recalled the "powerful debate" over having two fighters share the award. Of course, The Ring's manner of selection was a bit different in that bygone period, as was the whole Fighter of the Year concept.

First, The Ring at that time gave no such award as "Fighter of the Year." Instead, it offered something called the "Most Valuable Boxer" award, which had been launched in 1928 with the first recipient being Gene Tunney. The honor had less to do with a fighter's achievements during a calendar year and more to do with sportsmanship and being a good ambassador. It was more like an award of merit. Another difference was that the voters weren't restricted to The Ring offices; they included promoters, commissioners, referees and just about anyone on Fleischer's mailing list. The biggest difference, however, was that unlike today, where votes aren't tallied until December, the award was presented mid-year. Tommy Loughran, for instance, received his 1929 and 1931 awards in September of those years.

In 1934, Fleischer held the vote during the year's first quarter. It is possible that he had rushed this vote because there'd been no winner in 1933. That year's choice, Primo Carnera, had been rejected by Fleischer because of Carnera's link to organized crime. Regardless, the early survey resulted in a tie between Ross and Canzoneri. This was a bit strange, since Canzoneri's recent history included a pair of close losses to none other than ... Barney Ross.

How did Canzoneri earn a tie with the opponent who beat him twice? Well, it was likely because of his popularity. Just five months prior to the vote, he'd hit the peak of his fame with a second-round KO of Kid Chocolate, earning a five-minute screaming ovation from the Madison Square Garden customers, a crowd described by The Brooklyn Citizen as "wild." By this point in his career,

Customized clothing has become a hallmark for Tyson Fury 2.0 ...

"Canzi" was practically a New York institution, as beloved as Nathan's Famous hot dogs. His connection to the city can't be discounted, because at that time The Ring voters usually selected a fighter with a strong presence in New York, which was not only the boxing mecca but was also the country's loudest media horn. Even Germany's Max Schmeling, who won the honor in 1930, had done a lot of fighting there. How important was New York in determining these awards? Well, consider that The Ring's headquarters was in the Big Apple for many years, situated right in The Garden; Fleischer relied heavily on New York writers; and the chairman of the voting jury on at least a few occasions was New York mayor Jimmy Walker. Ross, meanwhile, was a Chicagoan who by this time had

MIKEY WILLIAMS/TOP RANK

competed in New York only twice. The fact that Ross earned so many votes was proof of his growing status. Still, even though he'd lost twice to Ross less than a year earlier, Canzoneri earned equal attention on the ballots. Was it his likeability? His crowd-pleasing style? Recalling the stalemate a few years later, Ring writer Dan Daniel said Fleischer simply "refused to break the tie."

In May of 1934, Fleischer organized a quick ceremony at Grossinger's Country Club in Ferndale, New York, presenting Ross and Canzoneri with matching silver belts. The afternoon was full of drama, for the managers of the two fighters despised each other and nearly canceled the whole affair.

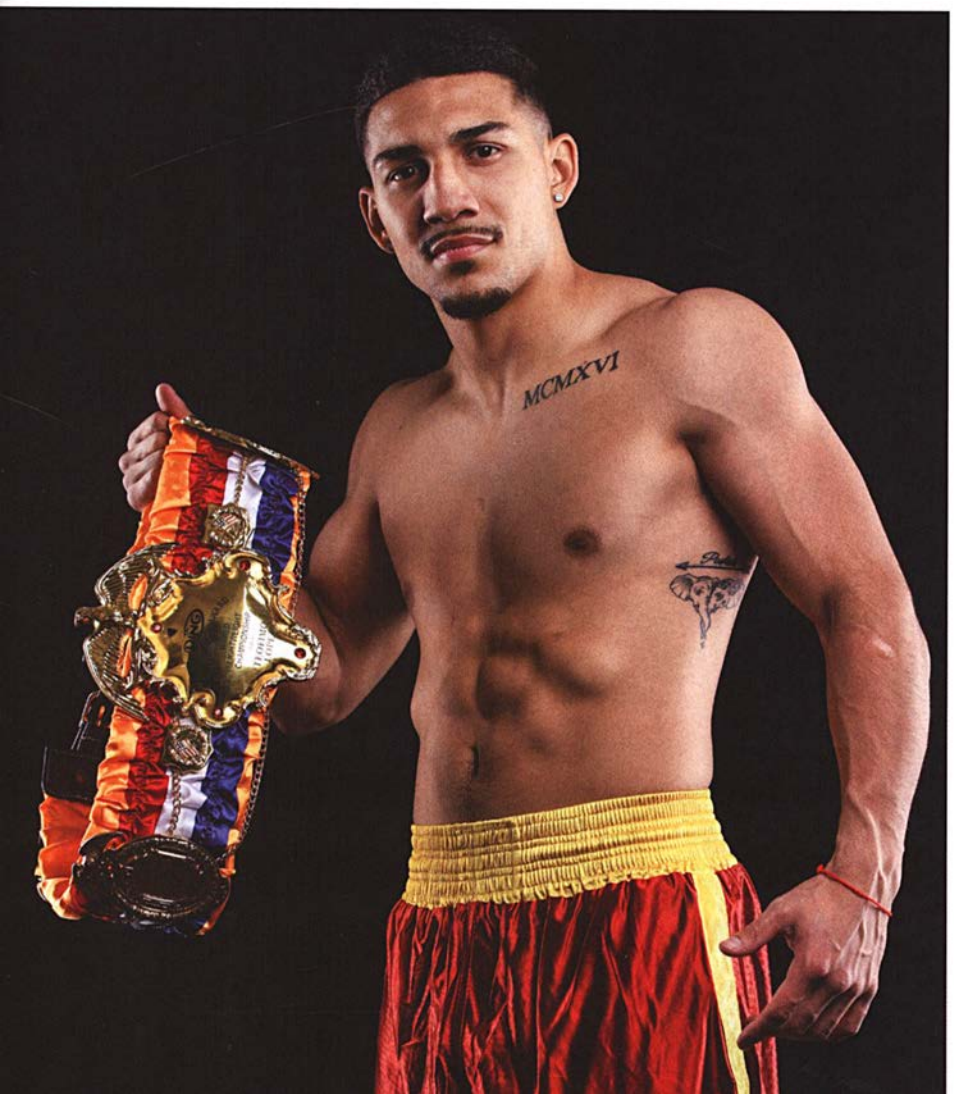
The irony is that the rest of the year was a showcase for Ross, thanks to his pair of bouts with the great Jimmy McLarnin, winning and losing the welterweight title in the process. By beating McLarnin in their first meeting, Ross became the first lightweight champion to successfully challenge for the welterweight crown. That in itself was newsworthy, as was his owning the two titles simultaneously. The following January, when Fleischer composed his mammoth list of annual ratings that would be sent to news outlets, Ross was declared "the year's outstanding fighter." If he looked at a newspaper at the dawn of the new year, Ross learned that The Ring had chosen him as the top fighter of 1934. Huge headlines said as much.

In the February 1935 issue of The Ring, Fleischer appeared to verify the news in his massive recap of the previous year, stating on page 11: "The year's highest award goes to Ross for turning a trick unexcelled in modern fisticuffs – holding two titles at one time." Fleischer's annual report barely acknowledged Canzoneri, describing him as slightly past his prime but still entertaining. If Ross had competition for the top spot, judging by Fleischer's year-end synopsis, it would've been from Max Baer or McLarnin, not Canzoneri. Yet being the best fighter, or the outstanding fighter, wasn't the same as being the Most Valuable Boxer, which had been decided seven months earlier. As far as Fleischer was concerned, the voters had spoken. By today's criteria, the 1934 Fighter of the Year would've probably been Ross alone.

Forgotten by history is the tie that occurred in 1938 when Joe Louis and Henry Armstrong received the same number of votes. The cover of our March '39 issue featured both of their smiling faces above the phrase "Most Valuable Boxers of 1938." It seemed the verdict was accepted as the cover was being designed. Fleischer, however, stepped forward and called it for Louis. The reason? Armstrong had allegedly delayed a fight that year by faking a back injury. To Fleischer, the Most Valuable Boxer had to be as honest as a Boy Scout, regardless of his ability. The decision to bump Armstrong, readers were assured, came with "sincere regret."

By the 1940s, the Most Valuable Boxer category was renamed Fighter of the Year. By then, The Ring was consistently announcing the winner in January, rather than at Fleischer's mid-year whim, and boxing officials were no longer invited to vote, the task falling solely to sportswriters. Consequently, previous Most Valuable Boxers (Tunney, Loughran, Schmeling, etc.) were retrofitted into the new Fighter of the Year classification.

If we were still presenting awards for Most Valuable Boxer, we couldn't find a better pair than Fury and Lopez. Indeed, their contributions last year were of equally great value. Each man helped lift a sport that was, like all else in the world, in desperate need of reasons to cheer.



MATTHEW HEASLEY

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